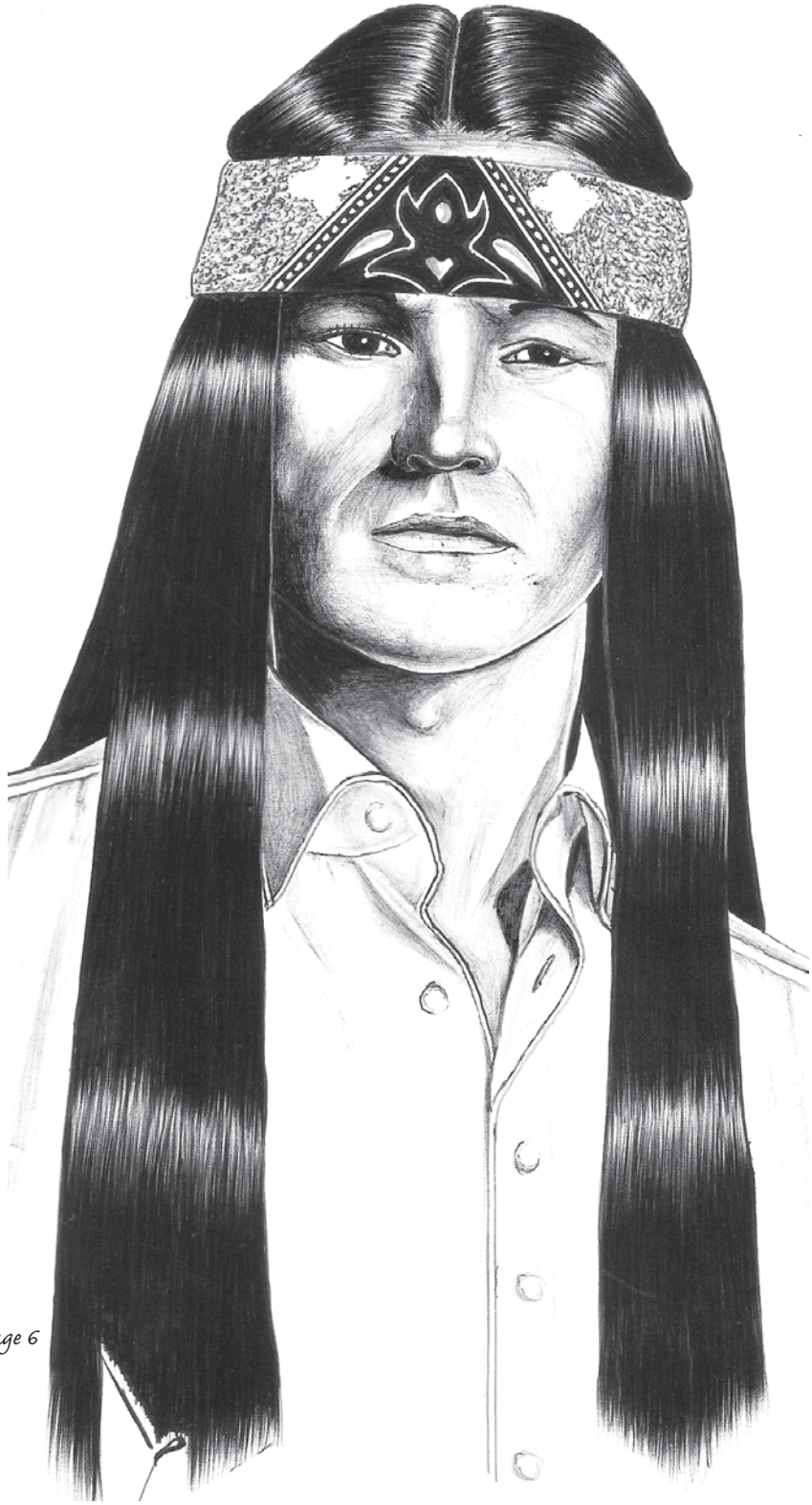
i feel so much pain
i'm in so much shame
but I just can't explain
i try my hardest
to maintain
i'm not the one to blame
everything seems so
much the same
once you're dead
everybody forgets yo
name
but why —
i just can't explain

check out the rest of Lil' Jt's POW on page 6



EDITOR'S NOTE VOLUME 11.40

Hey Beat editorial note readers! What's the word in your world? Well, we suppose we'll soon find out once we get through this editorial note, given this week's Beat is filled with thousands of words from you all, from our topics that we present to you each week, to your own personal thoughts and ideas that you so courageously share with us all in these pages.

Not to sound corny, but we at The Beat Within are all really proud of you writers and your efforts to teach, to write and share through The Beat Within. Just think if every writer took his or her writing as seriously as you, how powerful this publication would be?

By the way, you know who steps up each week and attempts to drop game in a respectful way is the maximum security units. The max units are no joke, youngstas. Too many of our best writers are facing years in the CYA or in the CDC.

It is these writers who, over time, open up. We at The Beat get to meet and read the child in so many of you, who long for home, a hug from mom, auntie, grandma, and wish for the good ol' days when life was so much easier.

What is clear is that the max unit writers are always a step more serious than any other unit. Historically this has been the case, from the early days to today's efforts.

Why does it have to take "hard time," the fear of prison, life in prison, being tried as an adult, knowing you will not be going back to the house for a long while to wake a young man/woman up?

It's like life at first is one big joke. Your first few times you get slapped on the wrist, you are in and out of juvenile, you return to the 'hood, with a little juvie/back of the police car experience and now you are big and bad, as you put the mask of the tough guy on more and more. Then in due time, for those who continue to laugh at the system, they think that they have the last laugh, and that jail presents very little fear, 'cause thus far nothing is happening.

In truth, it's the system who will have the last laugh, 'cause the greedy and baddest wannabe youngstas get caught up. If you doubt us, ask the guys in max, who are locked up for a number of serious cases, or have simply exhausted every single opportunity the system has presented to them. But still it's the criminal justice system's fault for you being incarcerated, right? It's their fault that you decided to pull a lick. It's the system's fault that you were so damn loyal to the 'hood. It's the system's fault that they gave you a date to see your PO and you failed to go to the meeting.

This is not to say that the system's perfect, it's far from that. The system is awful! The system needs to be destroyed and rebuilt, but..., yes, but you do not help matters when you disrespect the family and put the negative living first. You put the dope over school. You put the park over a part time job. You put the gun in your pants over the pencil and paper. You pull the trigger, stab the enemy, beat the shhh out of who ever, over giving one a hug.

So now you sit in jail; now you realize that the homies are not really homies; now you see the chaos... People are pointing fingers, folks are talking, no letters are coming, and a lawyer, your PO, and a counselor is giving you directives on your life, plus you rarely get visits, if any. It's all bad, and the case is serious enough to be looking at CYA or the CDC(R).

Now you long for peace, love and understanding. These feelings are no longer corny mushy words anymore. Now the tears are no joke. Now loneliness is kicking you in the ass and the fear that this incarceration living may be your life forever and ever.

Oh, this breaks our hearts. And when The Beat Within comes through your max unit to provide you with a paper and pencil, you finally take this special outlet serious, but when you were in those other respectable units, it was all about getting back to the 'hood, putting in work, smoking blunts and downing forties. But today it is longing for mom, your son/daughter, the wish to graduate and walk across stage, or — as many say — the chance to turn back the hands of time.

This week's topics that were addressed in our classes prior to the writing in this issue were "What Is Something That Is Stabbing You In The Heart?" -We all have had someone betray us or stab us in the back, but has something ever stabbed you so hard that you feel it deep inside you, as if a knife were plunged into your heart? It could have happened recently or years ago, but you can still feel it to this day, and no matter how hard you try to forget it, it's in you and you just can't forget? What is this deep wound that you wish you could just grab and get it out of you, or push it as far away from you as possible?

Our second topic, "Why Do We Treat Strangers Better Than Those We Love?" -Have you ever wondered why it is that we treat strangers that we accidentally knock into with many smiles and apologies, but if we do the same to a loved one, we aren't so kind? Why do we continually hurt those that we see every day, those that we say we love so much? Is it because we take their love for granted, and think we can do anything to hurt them and it's ok? Think about it. Do you ever feel that your own loved ones treat strangers better than they treat you? Why is this? What would change in your life if you treated your loved ones like they were strangers on the street, and if they treated you the same? Would your life be better or worse? Tell us how.

The third topic, "From The Beat Writers:" Part of our precious job is to write a response back to every single piece we publish. Our responses range from high praise and deep respect for your words and your way of expressing them, to anger and disappointment when we read pieces that don't teach anything at all, or worse, teach that you can get away with doing dirt with no consequences. Now it's your turn to respond to our responses. So give us a "From The Beat Writer" reaction to "From The Beat." Do our responses help, hurt or count for nothing?

Lastly, "Woke Up This Morning..."

Writers! Do not forget our 16th editorial note writing contest! Here's the details ... The contest question to consider writing on is, "A Letter To The President." For this contest we want you serious writers to write a letter to President Bush! It is our goal to not only post these letters in The Beat Within publication and our website, but to send them off to the White House, too! Now, do we need to suggest topics on what to talk about? Doubt it. So with this said, our contest question is all about you writing a letter to President Bush. (Don't write anything that will get you in trouble with the Office of Homeland Security...)

The contest submission deadline will be Election Day, Tuesday, November 7, 2006. As is the case with all of our writing contests, all pieces submitted will be featured in the BWO (Beat Without) section of the "big" Beat over several issues. And once all have been featured, The Beat editors will read and vote on their four favorites. From these reads, our top-vote-getter will receive a one-hundred-dollar money order. Our second place winner will get a fifty-dollar money order. And our third and fourth-place winners will receive twenty-five-dollar money orders. Good luck writers!

OK, with great honor we thank Slow Pain, Mark, Lashonda from SF/YGC, Maile from Walden House PSK, Big Vic, Lil' Jt who writes two, DeTay, Baby Girl, J, Lil' Naud, all from the 150 Crew. Last but not least, Chris and Nina who writes three, both from Arizona, for their amazing and heartfelt POW (Piece Of the Week) contributions.

This issue goes out to positive change. If you have positive change on your mind and/or are putting in the hard work to changing your old ways, this issue then goes out to you, 'cause what you are doing is not easy work. It's hard work. It's hard to change. It's hard for most of us to stop doing the little bad things, let alone most of you have to change in a big time way. You need to change your childish ways. You need to change your thinking, your mindset and your attitude. You need to change the way you were living in order to stay free. You need to change what it is you know and only knew, and live life as far away from those bad habits and influences as possible. And if you are doing just that, then this issue is for you.

See you next week!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Beat Within, a weekly newsletter of writing and art by incarcerated youth, is published by Pacific News Service.

At The Beat Within, we go through a lot of trouble to censor inappropriate sexual remarks, foul language, and gang references. There is enough tension in our commuities already–we don't aim to bolster it. It is in The Beat's interest to promote peace and unity. Our goal is to educate one another.

The Beat Within publishes the opinions and views expressed by the participants in our workshops. This is simply the pure voice of the youth. The views you read do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editor or staff. All rights are reserved. Nothing from this publication can be reproduced without our written permission.

To our writers: What you write could be hazardous to you. Your words have consequences, and could be used to incriminate you. Try to illuminate your feelings and viewpoints without running the risk of providing ammunition for those who might use your words against you.

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Art: Much props to everyone for the great art this week.

Spiritual Advisor: Jack Jacqua

Special Volunteer: Nancy DeMartini

Book Donor: Marisela Norte

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Writers: Thanks to all the participants in our workshops in the San Francisco's Youth Guidence Center and Log Cabin Ranch School and the Walden House Facility, Maricopa County, Arizona, Walden House, Santa Clara, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, EPA Charter, RAP High School, Alameda County, Santa Cruz County and Marin County Juvenile Halls. As well as Natural Bridge in Virginia, and Hidden TREWTH in Rhode Island. If you have any questions or comments about The Beat Within, or if you would like to become a subscriber, contact us at: 275 Ninth St. SF.CA. 94103 or call (415) 503-4170 or check us out at:

www.thebeatwithin.org

EDITOR'S NOTE 2
WRITE TO READ 4
PIECES OF THE WEEK 5
CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK 10
STANDOUTS 13
SAN MATEO COUNTY 28
WEEKLY WRITINGS 32
VOICES IN SPANISH 45
THE BEAT WITHOUT 46
BWO THROW BACKS 57

Literacy for Youth

From The Beat: It's so wonderful to have back Your Libyrical Miracle, Amy, the 150 Crew Librarian with her latest thoughts to share with you Beat readers. Amy always drops important information for all of us to embrace, and this week is no different. As for writing for the ANG Newspapers, which she speaks about in the opening paragraphs, we do not know too much about this, so write at your own discretion.

Hi Beat

I have been looking forward to writing for these pages and talking with you about some new books that have come in. I hope to write next week, too, because I got a lot of new books in, too many to list here. Also.... I have information about another opportunity for you to see your words and lives out in the world in a positive way!

If you'd like to possibly see your writing published in the newspapers around Oakland, ANG Newspapers are looking for stories and articles from youth (and people who work with youth, including parents) to talk about the growing up experience. Where did your good turns come in life and where the sad or bad experiences influenced your future actions. The stories or articles should be from 500 to 750 words. I know some of the topics you write about for The Beat will be great to send in for a different audience to read.

Send your writing to:

Clarence Johnson
ACJJ DPC
Box 2059
Oakland, CA 94684
Only your first name will be used.

NEW BOOKS . . . . . .

Just out in paperback!

Harry Potter #6 ...those of you into Harry Potter need no further info....

Cirque du Freak # 10, The Lake of Souls... those of you into this need no further info.... AND a new book

The Demonata : Lord Loss, also by Darren Shan... the first in a new series.

Captain Underpants and the Preposterous Plight of the Purple Potty People Those of you who know about these books are ready for some new laffs!

In Sheep's Clothing by Mary Monroe... her latest

Jesus Land by Julia Scheeres How many of you have ever had someone in your life who was hypocritical? (Someone who says one thing but does another)? This is the true story of the extreme of that. Julia's mom and dad did not practice what they preached, and Julia tries to find comfort in drink and in sex with a classmate. Julia ends up in a reform school on an island... in many ways, I'd say that reform school is way worse than any Juvenile Hall I've been in. This book is one of the best true stories I've read in a long time.

Three New Bluford Series!!

The Fallen: Frankie, the most feared homeboy from his neighborhood is stalking Martin. Alone, and with time running out, Martin makes a desperate choice. Will it save or destroy him?

Shattered: a painful secret is ruining Darcy's closest friendships at Bluford High and an even deeper lie is tearing her family apart. Darcy must confront her past – and the truth. What she discovers will change her world forever.

Search for Safety: There is no escape for Ben McKee. For weeks, he's covered the bruises on his body. He's lied to his teachers and his friends. But the trouble isn't going away and if he doesn't act soon, the trouble could swallow him and his mother forever.

And some new ones I think you'll really, really like:

Street Pharm by Alison van Diepen: Ty Johnson inherits the family business at age 14 when his father went to jail. The supply game's in his blood. And life is pretty sweet when you're on top. But one slip - or one serious competitor - and life turns ugly fast. Suddenly, Ty's got to rethink his whole strategy. And for the number one dealer on the streets, strategy is not just about staying ahead. It's about survival.

Sammy and Juliana in Hollywood by Benjamin Alire Saenz: " The first thing the dead dois lose their voices. But they have their ways of making us listen. Maybe the dead need those of us who made it out alive to go out into the streets and tell everyone what happened. Maybe they want us to point fingers. Maybe they want us to tell anyone who'll stop and listen that once, the world was theirs, too. Maybe they won't leave us alone until we say their names out loud again and again." The Hollywood where Sammy Santos lives in not one of glitz and glitter, but a barrio at the edge of a small town. The book is a love story – love for a girl and a neighborhood.

For readers exploring a bigger picture of the world and what's going on outside and yet inpacting your life:

Brutal Imagination by Cornelius Eady. Do any of you remember that woman Susan Smith who killed her kids? Susan Smith (a white woman) said that a black man stole her car and kidnapped her children....and then we found out that Susan Smith drove her car into a lake and killed her kids. This book of poems is written in the voice of the young black man that Susan said was responsible for the death of her children.

What Every Person Should Know about War by Chris Hedges. What is war? Has the world ever been at peace? How many people have died in war? How much does war cost? What is genocide? How many child soldiers are there? If I enlist in the military, what will my life be like? Can I withstand torture? How do interrogators make captured soldiers talk? What will happen if I die? Questions, answers, and lots of things to think about in this book.

They Poured Fire on Us From the Sky: True Story of Three Lost Boys from Sudan: They were all under the age of seven when their families were massacred and their village in Africa was destroyed. Without food, water, shoes or parents, they crossed a 1000 miles of lion and crocodile infested territory. After five years of fleeing war, starvation and wild animals, they reached a refugee camp in Kenya where they ate only _ cup of corn meal a day. "We went to school and ate once a day in the evening. But reading was really difficult because there was a certain cloud because of hunger. It's black when you look at the words in the book. The black covers the words and you can't see because of that color in your eyes from the hunger." In 2001, the boys moved to America to continue their education, where they encountered cell phones, more food than they had ever seen before and tried to get a job, learn how to drive, etc.

-Your Libyrical Miracle, Amy, 150 Crew Librarian

PIECES OF THE WEEK

My Life In Jail

When I was eleven, I committed my first crime. I was already in a gang and I was trying to prove myself. My life changed my first time in jail. I did a couple days in juvenile hall, but those days changed my whole life.

I was already in the system when I committed my second crime. I was caught with a gun. My enemies killed my homeboy, that's why I was mad. He was like my big brother, and I was tryin' to prove to everybody that no one can mess with my family or my homeboys.

I was looking for my enemies or the boy who killed my homeboy. I couldn't find the guy, so the narcs came and I got locked up for having a gun with me. I was in a car with my homeboys. They all went to jail, too, so I got my first felony.

I was fighting a few years at YA, but my PO decided to send me to a group home.

I went to another two group homes and I always keep running all the time.

I was caught up in a big ol' riot in the Mission', 'cause the enemies came to the block to start shhh. I was fighting with them with my homies 'til the cops came. I was fighting with this big guy until the cops came. I was running in the Mission—the cops told me to stop. I was running—a cop came from two blocks ahead of me and put a gun in my face—told me to stop. I was thinking about running. I couldn't run. I couldn't do nothin'. You know when you wanna do something, you can't do it? I stopped, threw my hands in the air, let them arrest me. I went to the hall—that's when the shhh started.

Now, months later, they sent me to the Ranch. When I first came, I was getting into fights. I was getting dead time, 'cause I was letting people know how my blood run —fighting, don't let nobody disrespect. But I was getting dead time and I was thinking about my mom, my girl, so I make a choice to stop getting dead time. I already finished my dead time. Now I'm trying to better my life, because I don't like to see my moms cry.

Now I learned to control my anger, to let people talk. You know people talk in here. But I be going to the Omega program—I be talking to Jack (Jacqua) and Cowboy (Jack's assistant.) I be learning some stuff to control my anger, listen to what people say, listen to counselors.

Chino's a cool counselor (at the Ranch.) He be tryna help me out. When people be talkin' stuff to me and he knows it's making me mad, Chino be tellin' me to let them talk. People be talkin' about your girl, but Chino taught me that shhh mean nothin' to me. I used to fight with the black kids when they talked about my girl, but people be tellin' me—don't listen.

BJ (a Ranch counselor) be helping me learn to play sports, to keep me busy, thinkin' about gettin' a job, takin' care of my mom, my girl.

Ana, the social worker, she be talk to me about how I'm doin', what I'm gonna do when I get out.

Thank you to The Beat Within and thank you to Pauline for coming every Friday.

-Slow Pain LCRS, SF/YGC

From The Beat: And thank you, Slow Pain, for trusting The Beat Within and for writing your heart out every week. We appreciate your contributions. By telling your story, you show s signs of maturity and what's real cool is that you are using the resources at the ranch, aka the counselors, social worker and Omega . But we worry big time about the day you are released, then what? Can you avoid the havoc in the hood? Can you avoid following the homies and be your own leader? Can you drop the gang life? We say yes you can. One day at a time. You have a load of potential, use it to better your life.

Is All That We See Or Seem But A Dream Within A Dream?

Someone asked me today if I exist
I wanted to answer, "Can I clench sand in my fist?
Does the wave rise from the horizon and clash with the shore?
Is there enough light or do we need more?
Can a dream be caught in some cheap Indian lace?
Can flowers blossom and die in a broken, chipped vase?
Do birds chirp when the sun rises in the morning?
Do we really get soaked when the skies start pouring?
If we fall is it guaranteed we'll smack the floor?
Just 'cause there's a mystery do we need to explore?
What's the difference between wrong and right?
Is there really a difference between day and night?
When someone screaming is it always heard?
Just because it is spoken does it make it a word?
When people laugh is it really funny?
Can you skin a poor baby bunny?
Watch it squirm and shriek in pain?
Were you ever perfectly sane?
What's the point of waking up if you can live in a dream?
It always tends to be better in the dream state it usually seems
But when you're awake is it when you're dreaming?
What if there's never really a state called sleeping?"
I guess we'll never really know
I'm going upstream but still going with the flow

-Mark B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We hope you get to see this, Mark, because it's a remarkable poem filled with questions we hardly ever have seen in The Beat. We gave the title to this poem from one by the American poet, Edgar Allen Poe, because it reminded us of it. When we read (and listen to) your words, we are not worried at all that you are still going "upstream." After all, that is where the salmon spawn.

What's the difference between wrong and right?

Is there really a difference between day and night?

Woke Up This Morning

Woke up this morning with a thought on my head
No clue of what I was gonna do so I read instead
Woke up this morning wonderin' why I lead the life I lead
And my mind went blank like my white bed cover sheets
Lost within my thoughts
When something came to mind
Sometimes I wish this life wasn't mine
I slipped up and fell with no thought of being able to turn back
Now I realize there is something I lack,
Woke up this morning
Knowing I need help
Because the strength I want isn't being felt
Woke up this morning with tears in my eyes
Sayin', "Boy oh boy, all I can do is try"
So I'll make my effort because I know it counts,
Then tomorrow I will start by saying I have something to announce.

-Lashonda GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: This is really a wonderful poem, Lashonda. Acknowledging that you need help is not a sign of weakness but of strength! It is the first and most important step towards change, and it is the hardest step to take. Yes, all you can do is try — and take all the help you can get. Don't worry about making announcements; it's what you do that counts.

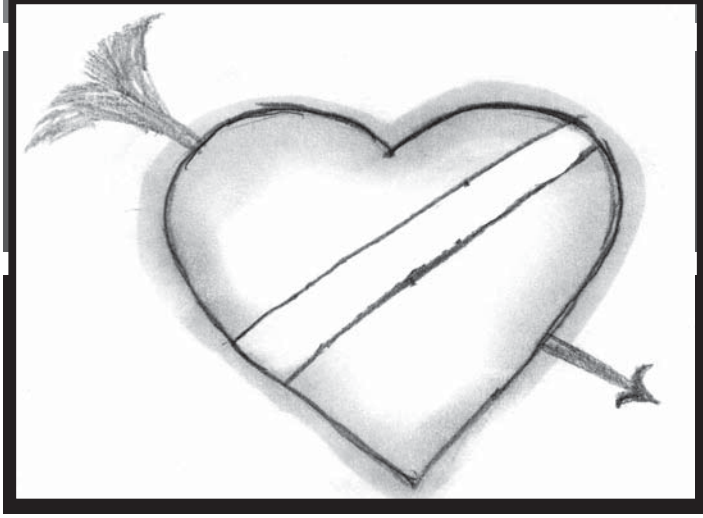
PIECES OF THE WEEK

All I See Is Night

sometimes i just look out my window
i realize my life has fallen like snow
i have no sense of direction, don't know which way to go
i just go, with whatever way the wind blows
my whole being slowly begins to melt
this feeling i'm feeling i have never felt
it's like anger, pain and sadness all in one
all the happiness in my life is done
i eff'd up and i know it
but the only way to express myself is writing like a poet
it's hard to survive knowing my future looks dim
knowing that this case i'm fightin' i can't win
so i just look out my window and escape in my mind
hoping that somewhere, someplace, happiness is what i'll find
people always try to be so kind
but i always let them down and start to grind
shhh is gettin' crazy, now i'm getting ready to explode
i have too much on my load
it's at the level when push turns to shove
sooner or later someone might go above
murders committed with no gloves
in my window there is no love
happiness is so strange i might get an allergic reaction
it might be bad or it might bring satisfaction
my window holds the truth
on one side i'm out, on the other i'm aloof
where will i be in the coming years
sooner or later i will face them fears
so i try to talk, but no one seems to hear
so i get the pencil and i begin to write
'cause sometimes when i look out my window all i see is night

-Big Vic, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** The poet rises from the mind's quicksand and stands weightless as if on solid land, and speaks the heart's deepest need in its moment of darkest self-defeat. Like an animal enraged, a tiger tormented in a tiny cage, the poet sees himself as bereft of hope and feeds on his anger like a fiend for dope. Violence would at least punctuate the stillness of time which leads to no relief for the poet's feverish mind, or so he thinks for a moment before fantasies of vengeance too lose savor's enjoyment. His salt tears might fill an ocean if he ever took the notion to let them drop. And each night he prays the pain within will stop when he starts to dream, desperate to escape a reality more obscene than a devil's drooling grin. Against all this he fights like a warrior still, wielding like a mighty shield a slender yellow pencil. Indeed by its power, he rebukes all devils and his own fear day by day, night by night, and hour after hour. Invoke young poet the powerful muse of your own imagination by whose divine inspiration the prisoner loosens his heavy mental chains to step through the thick, physical walls of his spirit's incarceration — free at last, free at last, thank God almighty, time has passed.*



Woke Up Wanting To Change

Today when I woke up this morning, I had a real change of heart on a few things that will really change my life for the best. I woke up wanting a good relationship with my mother.

I have been saying that I hate her so much and I don't eve want to talk to her again because of the past. But now I can say I can start forgiving her and do want to talk to her and tell her I love her and mean it.

This morning I woke up happier than I have been in almost a month, and don't know why I have had this change of heart all of a sudden. But I think it's time now for my life to be turned around. When I woke up this morning, I wanted to change, and that's what I'm going to do. My actions will show you that very soon!

-Maile, Walden House PSK

***From The Beat:** We don't know what has made you want to change, but we love the fact that you do. Maybe you just moved from childhood into adulthood. Maybe the drugs that have clouded your thinking have disappeared leaving you a clear mind. Maybe you realize that your mother has sacrificed a lot for you, and that it's time for a little repayment. Maybe you're just tired of not being able to do all that you are capable of doing. But whatever it is, we are standing here applauding.*

When I woke up this morning, I wanted to change, and that's what I'm going to do.

Explain

i feel so much pain
i'm in so much shame
but I just can't explain
i try my hardest to maintain
i'm not the one to blame
everything seems so much the same
once you're dead everybody forgets yo name
but why — i just can't explain
it was all good when you had the money and fame
why did you use that excuse with nothing to gain
when you know that the gun shouldn't'a been aimed
then you tried to run when the roller's came
tell my why — i just can't explain
there's so many killings, here is where it remains
while mom's sitting at home crying tears of rain
while youngstas are using god's name in vain
but why — i just can't explain,
just what are you trying to obtain
you're throwing your life away
and playing it like a game
i feel like i'm in hell driving in the fast lane
the devil is trying to take over
i gotta break away from the chains
but why — i just can't explain
this world is crazy and i'm going insane
how can people make you feel so lame
but at the same time make you feel inflamed
now somebody's dead because we went off like a hurricane
but why — i just can't explain
i gotta get ready for war so i train
not just my body but my brain
why is this life how it is
is because the block we claim
can somebody please tell me why
— because i just can't explain

-Lil' Jt, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** With this poem you've returned to your classical form, taking our readers down the page by storm, making us all recognize the needless harm that falls on all those who take up arms to fight wars or who lose their tempers for no good cause or who thought money and fame elevated them above a game that in the end always brings pain, trouble, misfortune and death. But if you ask us for the answer, it's a waste of breath, 'cause the only answer that counts comes from the heart in your breast, comes by you doing your best to rise above for the sake of those who love you and those whom you love. Still, you explain a lot, even while you tell us you don't know why it can't stop.*

PIECES OF THE WEEK

Trying They Best To Breathe

everyday we struggle with sorrow
wondering if we will live to see tomorrow
mom crying because you got hit with a hollow
choking up blood made it hard for him to swallow
ninja creeping in all black you thinkin' it's a shadow
you got laid down and they made it seem like it was a battle
taking a nap in a casket instead of a cradle
family was hoping it was all just a fable
i didn't think you would die that fast, you only got hit in the navel
now yo' family is struggling to pay the cable
while you laying in a grave, forgot about, with no label
i know you wish yo' family was able to stay stable
but it's hard to be balanced with three legs on a table
this world is crazy, i wish i could take the pain away
death toll is one hundred and ten kills as of today
i can't do nothing because revenge is here to stay
the grave is one place i hope not to lay
god help us, i get on my knees and pray
but instead they're still killing 'cause they wanna make them pay,
trying to put on a smile but it's fake like a weave
they wasn't ready but it was they' time to leave
while they keep shooting them, making them bleed
while they are tryin' they' hardest to breathe

-Lil' Jt, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This brutally honest poem does indeed take our breath away, for a moment, unlike those bleeding in the street and dying in torment for whom time stops forever after they lose their battle keep on breathing for the sake of loved ones they want to keep on seeing. And the cruel picture you paint of bullets still flying into the next dying martyr to the vengeance cycle. No, it's not true, vengeance need not be here to stay unless we as a society agree to go on living (and watching young thugs dying) this way. When Mandela became South Africa's first African head of state, he declared a universal amnesty — but there were hundred and hundreds of community meetings where the killers had to face the family of those they had killed, and hear them out. How do we find that sort of (national and local) will to make change come about? Your poem makes us see/feel the problem, which must come before the will of the people to solve it. Thanks.

Youngster Without Help

A lot of youngsters wonder why us youngsters act the way we do. I think it's because we don't get enough help. We're put down most of the time and discouraged by what people say or think about us — when really all we want is to be helped.

But nobody has the time to see that, 'cause nowadays the only thing people are focused on, is what's happening on the news channels and how they can survive. To them, we're animals in the forest: here today, gone tomorrow. Some of our own parents are helpless to help us, or else they're not trying to help us. So it's up to us to help ourselves by any means necessary — whether it's selling drugs, stealing, robbing, or whatever.

We become forced to commit these crimes as juveniles in order in order to survive in this world. We wasn't born to do these bad things. It's just something we adapt to while living in the ghetto. Now if our parents was doing a good job by raising us, then we wouldn't be the way we are today. All we want — is a little bit of help, which we never get.

-DeTay, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You are rapidly becoming the voice of your generation in the pages of The Beat Within. Now that doesn't mean that we agree with all your conclusions, but we learn from you exactly how so many in your generation, in your situation, in the ghetto, are feeling. And the power of what you have to say has us reeling, backpedaling before the truth you throw like a boxer's blows. Simply put, there is not enough help out there for you, just as you say. So what can we at The Beat do but admit that what you say is true — except for the part about selling drugs, stealing and robbing. 'Cause we're in a unique position to see that these acts may help you survive for a day but also set you up to pay years to a system that will do nothing to help you improve your position in what Bertolt Brecht once called "The Jungle of the City". As long as the city remains a jungle, you're doomed to bungle one day and pay the system with your freedom (if you don't pay your life to a rival in the junglish strife). These words are meant to help, 'cause you got it right when you said that you have to help yourself. DeTay, rise above the street, 'cause with your mind, you could teach ghetto youth there's a better way — be yourself the living proof, crime doesn't pay, but if educate your mind and quit the grind, you'll find a better day!

nowadays the only thing people are focused on, is what's happening on the news channels and how they can survive.

Read Me

Hello! I know your wondering what this piece of paper is doing in your cell... It's the only colorful thing in here, huh! Yup that's right...
Well I'm Baby Girl and I was the occupant of this box before you...
I left this in here so you would know about the ups and downs
about this here box...
Well, there is a brown thing on the ceiling. I
t's a wad of something.
I'm not sure what, but it was here before I was in here so I suggest you leave it alone.
It looks like it might bite.
Now there is also an ant that comes out every once in a while to say hi. Don't kill it, it might be beneficial when you get lonely.
Anyways, there are also a lot of dust balls
that form in the corners of this box,
but I don't know why.
I don't see how dust can collect
when you only have your bed setting and books in here.
Well bye now. Miss Winn takin' my pencil so I gotta go.
Bye.

-Baby Girl, 150 Crew

From the beat: This is such a fine piece of writing! You know what makes it so outstanding is that your writing tells us a story—we can picture not just the place you are describing but also the way you feel about it, or the way it makes you feel. Thanks so much and way to work the topic!

It's Your Call

You sleep were I slept for weeks
Where I didn't do nothing but think...
"I can't believe this is really me"
I hope you hear yourself say the same thing
In this cell that feels like hell
You hear the staff instead of the school bell
Wishin' that you were in the class
That you never passed
Grab a book
So time can pass
Get that knowledge
So people can be right when they call you a smart ass
And try not to cuss out the staff
Because then they'll only give you a bathroom pass
So stick this shhh out
Go dumb on the stage
On your graduation day
And say
"And you always said you'd never see the day"
Then go about your way
And remember you came for room number one

-J, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This is such an amazing piece! Dang! This does all sorts of things to the reader, from encouraging them to do better, to commenting on all of the things one misses out on when they follow the other path. We think you're an excellent writer and obviously too smart not to follow through and "go dumb" on the stage of your own graduation. Nice work...

PIECES OF THE WEEK

These Last Years

I never was like the way I am now. Back in the day when I was going to school, getting really good grades not getting in fights or getting in trouble of some kind. I used to be a honor roll student. I used to be in the school band, when I played the saxophone and the tenor sax.

In the 7th grade our band got an excellent in a band competition with other schools. Excellent was one of the highest that any band could get and only a couple of bands had gotten an Excellent. My mother was very proud of me for going from saxophone to tenors sax and doing great at it, even though I was only one of two of them that were in the band. The next year the band teacher had put me in the Jazz band group, but I had to move.

In the 8th grade I didn't get in to the band or anything else, but I still was doing good in school doing good at home, doing chores, feeding pets, and just helping out with my mom. All the time, after school me, my little brother, and my friend, Ruben, had played basketball all the time 'till it got dark and we had to go home. The next day we did the same thing all day. During the summer I still just played basketball.

When I became a freshman I got on the freshman football team. Even though our team wasn't very good I still played, and never gave up. My grades stayed good through the rest of the year. Everything was doing good through the end of the school year, I had met a lot of new people at my new school, got a girlfriend and did really good with my first year of high school.

During the end of the summer I had gotten myself into trouble. First, I wasn't going to school very much and was staying out late at night. I started smoking weed with Ruben. We would just stay with my girlfriend and her friend. They where older then us by like a year or so. They lived right across the street from Ruben. One night we were over there and Ruben's mom was calling for him, but we didn't hear her due to the music being too loud. His mom called the cops and we just ran, got on bike, and got away...or so we thought. We were coming back to Ruben's house when the cop came around the corner and got us. He took us to the Police Precinct, to take our picture and fingerprints. Our moms came and got us. It wasn't bad.

But the next day I was at home and my mom had came home from work. She said something to me that got me mad and so I hit our big screen TV. I broke the plastic screen and cut my knuckle and split it open. My mom called the cops and they came and took pictures of my head and the TV. I was taken to the intake holding cell for a couple of hours and then my mom came and got me. So in just two days I got curfew and domestic violence.

I went to court and got on probation, but I didn't see a PO for more then three months. For those three months I was just smoking and hanging out with my friends. From the end of November to the February that's all I did.

I went to school some of the time, but soon got kicked out. That's when I first met my PO. She got me back into school and had me drop in once every two weeks, but then she changed it to once a month.

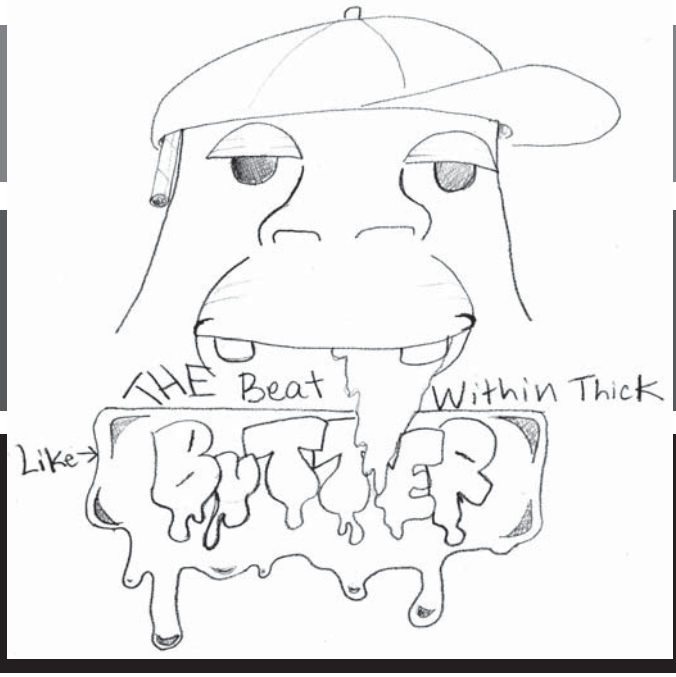
Months later I was all right, I was still smoking and hanging out late in the summer. I started to get worse at the end of the summer. I was stealing from houses, people, and cars.

A week before I got locked up, me and my homie Chris got caught with a stolen car. They were being messed up to us by saying things to us that was inappropriate. They let us go to our parents, but Chris had to get stitches by his chin and I got cut by my eye for getting in a hit and run during the cop chase. The week after that me and Ruben had gotten caught for burglary. Ruben had broken into a store, he was in there too long and the cops came and we ran, but I got caught first. I was hiding in some trees and they got me. Ruben was just walking down the street with the same clothes on and they stopped him. We got locked up at 6:00 a clock in the morning and had court the same day. They locked us up until Nov. 7th.

So from Sept. 29 to Nov. 7, I will have time to think of my life. Hope I get out, so I can have a chance to change my life for a good one.

-Chris, Durango Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Wow Chris! The last four years have been quite a wild ride for you and your mom! It sounds as if spending time with friends is important to you, and we want you to know that is an important part of growing up...developing relationships outside of family. We have a question for you though...are your friends leading you to danger or are you leading them into danger? From what you described about your life prior to getting involved in illegal activities you were actively involved in sports, music and school, so obviously you are a bright, talented young man. We challenge you to find creative ways to have fun with friends and at the same time put your talents to good use. Have you ever considered starting a band or organizing a sporting event or talent show at a local community center? These are activities in which you could use your talents and have a great time with others without endangering your freedom and adding stress to your family life. Let us know what you think.



Dear God

I got a few questions for you.
I really need guidance; can you tell me what to do?
I see myself crying, as other people stare.
In church I feel your presence, but are you really there?
Why did I live when I wanted to die?
Why do you continue to hide the truth but let out all the lies?
And why when I pray none of my prayers come true?
I just wish my life was better. I just wanna be more like you.
Why is it so hard for me to make things right?
Why are you leaving me all alone with no one in sight?
Dear God there's a lot I really want you to do,
But wait -- is it even fair for me to question you?

-Nina, Durango Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Great job on this poem!! The rhythm and rhyme are great, and it is also very meaningful. Questioning God is one of those things that many do when we experience pain. It is a very natural human reaction. But our favorite part is the last line where you seem to take a step back and say, "Wait, who am I to question God?" We believe that everything happens for a reason, and many times we may not be able to figure out the "whys?". Facing life and moving beyond the pain to hope takes faith. Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Even though you may be experiencing a lot of pain and hardship right now, there are lessons you will learn from these experiences that will make you stronger, if you allow them to. Don't give up, and don't stop asking God the hard questions. You will eventually get your answers and find the peace of mind you are seeking.

PIECES OF THE WEEK

True Story

It was a rainy day, she has just gotten home from school
She was bound to get a whoopin', this she already knew.
She attempted to run away, but saw her family, afraid they would tell
She ran back inside, got her whoopin' and to the ground she fell.
So upset, at only ten, she ran into the kitchen to grab a knife,
She held it to her wrist attempting to take her own life.
Again she was disciplined, which angered her even more
and she began to curse,
She ran to the kitchen grabbed a knife but this time made it worse.
She stabbed twice in the chest puncturing her right lung,
"This is it," she thought. "I'm only ten, no more life, no more fun."
Paramedics arrive, in what seems to take a long time, as we await the facts.
"Every time she breathes in," they said, "the hole gets bigger
causing her lung to collapse."
They have taken her by helicopter to get there in a fast way
"Hang in there," they say, "there will be a brighter day."
She lay in the I-C-U confused. "What do I say, what info do I keep?"
Not knowing what else to do she falls asleep.
She was awakened by many investigators, all in one room
asking so many questions,
all of them leading in the wrong direction.
They all wanted her to say her step-dad was the one who did it,
But she kept to her story saying, "He had nothing to do with this,
not one bit."
About a week goes by and she's done nothing,
but watch Indian in the Cupboard over and over again.
She prays to God saying, "I'm so young. I don't want to live my life in sin."
She gets moved to her own room, only getting visits from the pastor.
Everyday goes by so slow, she wishes they would go faster.
To make a long story short, she is finally released from the hospital
with stitches to her side.
As for her step dad, he was charged with child abuse because they lied.
But now she lives a negative life in hopes to change one day.
She's already been to juvy five times, not listening to what anyone has to say!

-Nina, Durango Maricopa County, Arizona

***From The Beat:** This was obviously a very significant and painful time in your life. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to have been the end of your journey down the wrong path, but the beginning. We hope that those five times in juvy have taught you that choosing to live the negative life only adds more pain. Sometimes life may put you in a bad situation, but it's your choice how you will respond. The past is a place not meant to dwell on but to learn from... we wonder what you have learned from these painful experiences? Will you let bad circumstances in the past or present defeat you by choosing the negative life? Or will you choose to overcome them by making positive choices and giving yourself a successful future? Powerful writing!*

Dear Self

Dear Self,
You're twenty-six now,
Controlling your anger I hope you figured out how.
Are you a choreographer? Did you follow your dreams?
Your life I hope you finally redeemed.
I hope you remember the battles you've fought.
You won, you're the real survivor now prove it,
No time to think twice, just to me to do it?
I'm just curious did I ever get that car,
Jetta was it? Though it probably wouldn't get you that far
Thinking of how mature you were I wonder how mature you are now,
All the challenges you've faced, you've always figured them out.
I just hope you were successful, but definitely not a failure,
I'm sure you followed your dreams and you became a dancer.
Giving up your potential it would be a shame
Just realize you have no else but yourself to blame.
Well on that note I better go, there's a lot to think about.
But thinking of a successful future, you won't let me down, I have no doubt!

-Nina, Durango Maricopa County, Arizona

***From The Beat:** We like the unique perspective of this poem – looking at yourself 10 years from now and wondering how your life turned out. Along the way to twenty six what were the meaningful lessons that you learned? Were you able draw from the experiences from the past? It seems far off now, but you would be surprised how quickly that time will pass. Learn as much as you can from every situation you are in and keep your goals and dreams in the forefront of your mind. Constantly ask yourself, "How will this decision help me accomplish my goals?" We have no doubt that you can accomplish all of the dreams expressed in this poem, but you must not forget that every choice you make, big or small, will either help you or hurt you in reaching those dreams.*

Dear God

Why is life worth livin' when you suffer on a daily basis, locked away in a cage like so kind of untamed animal. Never able to make your own choices, always waiting for that key to open the door to your cage.

The life you have chosen for me is like walking through a maze not knowin' what i'm a run into. They say life is a b, and death's her husband. Well I guess you can say I'm her cousin. Why must I feel like I want to be under the south layin' next to my ninja Cell.

Can hell really be worse than this?

What is my life coming to? So much time in these rooms. I've graduated from intake to B Unit, from B Unit to A Unit to C Unit to D Unit , from D Unit to Boys Control. And now I'm waiting for my ride to CYA in max unit.

Is this just a chapter of my life that I will overcome or will I keep graduating to a higher lockdown Hell?

But whatever it might be I will never give up on hope 'cause you have a purpose for me. Everything happens for a reason. To all, keep yo' heads up and one love, and we'll be out soon and always remember the three S's.

Stay Smart, Solid and Safe. RIP Marcellus. RIP Ray Ray , RIP Web.

-Lil' Naud, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** What makes life worth living? People like you, Arnaud. You, because even in the midst of your own pain you manage to write these powerful heartfelt pieces that end on a promise to 'never give up'. Because you look at your life and question it, because somewhere in your heart you know you deserve better, better than what you've been given, better than what you've given yourself so far. You, because everything you write has hope in it, and hope is what makes us human. What gives us heart. Now that you're going to the Y, demand help from your PO, demand college textbooks, continue to train your mind, continue to write. Graduate into your own life.*

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

Hey Inmate!

Hi to the next inmate.
Heads up be cool, stay strong,
you will get out soon
it's a matter of mind and time.
Don't let the time get to you
remain strong, stay positive.
Don't come back—let this be a timeout from the outside life.
Let it teach you a lesson
that you was doin' too much and now it's time to calm down.
If it wasn't for this hall time something else was bound to happen
so be strong and when you get out don't be stupid
and do the same thing you did to get in here.
Be smart. Be ahead, be a boss and do you don't do what feel what's right
at the moment. If you know right from wrong then you know
what and what not to do.
So do the do, and stay on top of the game.
Don't be no sucker.
You go out every time somebody else got the key to yo' door
and nobody got you here but your self.
So don't do it for me
do it for Mac Dre, naw just playin'.
This is real sis or brah,
stay on top of this shhh, don't come back

-Trice, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What a strong piece! We really like how far you stretched the metaphor of the Key to the door, and all of the good advice you have to share. Well done.

Scars

Self-inflicted or internal
Scars so deep within
Abuse, suicide attempts, rage
You have no idea where I've been.
Feelings of regret, questions constantly asked,
Why did I mess my body up like that?
Confusion, though I stopped
Why was there no one there? Where was everyone at?
Scarred internally from all of the pain,
I ask selfishly why me?
Frozen in thought, dwelling on the past
The reason I hurt so bad, I wish you could see.
I wish I could get rid of them
They've marked my body so,
I will use them to help others
And begin to let the past go,
It's time to move on
I can't continue to hold the past
One day it'll happen, though it may be hard
I shouldn't use excuses
Like using the NOBODY CARES card!

-Nina, Durango Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: This poem reveals a thought pattern that we hope is not just true for you in this poem, but in your everyday life as well. You begin by looking at your past, acknowledging that you have been permanently affected or "scarred" by events in your life. You express pain and confusion, which is natural, but you don't stop there. You move on to recognize that you have the opportunity to use what you've been through to help others, and that you must leave the past behind and move forward. It is hard, but we encourage you will continue to strive for that!

Something Stabbing Me In My Heart

The stabs in my heart:
Love is a big, big — I mean the main part — of the stab in my heart. From first sight, I fell for her. It was so hard for me. She was my world. She just shattered my heart.
The stabs in my heart:
All the drama, the fake-ass friend that done me dirt, the two-faced back stabbing.
The stabs in my heart:
Hearing all the gun shots, killing, and al the violence. Hearing the cries of kids wanting out.
The stabs in my heart:
With all the racism and homophobia in my life, the drugs and alcohol…
The stabs in my heart

-Doloris, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: This is a sad but wonderful little piece of writing, Doloris. You have given some very good examples of the kind of stabbing pain we were talking about. Yes, there is a lot of racism and homophobia in the world, but — as an alcoholic friend of ours once told us — there is no problem in the world that can't be made worse by alcohol (and drugs). So we hope you're learning some new techniques and skills to deal with the pains in your hear that don't lead to even more pain. Keep writing!

Time to Live a Life of Righteousness

I did all the bad I wanted to do. I ended up in jail at least ten times. I was in foster care four times before I went into the juvenile system. I went to two different group homes and was placed on EM (electric monitor) once. As you can see, none of that made me want to go the right way, 'cause I'm sittin' here telling the story. I've got down with the streets. I lived grimey and don't got nothing to show for it. I dropped out of school in ninth grade, but do you know what? I'm still here, ready to share my adventure.

In the game, we can't win for losing, and it don't matter what part of the game you played! It's still the game, regardless of how you try to look at it. I don't want to do it anymore, not because I'm here and I want to get out, but because I am getting out — because I want a better life for myself! I want to be able to speak on sweet and sour, not just the mean and the cruel. That's all I can rely on at this point. But believe me, the mentality I have now had made me realize there is so much more to life than what I lived.

The good thing about the way I lived, is I'm strong, not weak-minded, and I refuse to be played as a fool. Yes, I do have street smarts, but that can only get you so far. See, another thing I have is common sense and a good heart. I'm ready for the good! They are giving me a chance to go home on EM again, and this time I want to be alone. When I go to court, I will walk with a smile on my face and with my head held high, because I'm gonna be more than a detainee or a number. I am Danielle Alice M—, and that means something to me! I don't care what it means to you, 'cause one thing I learned is I came in this world alone and I know for sure I'll be leaving alone.

So I love what I am ready to do with my life, and I hope you do, too! God bless you all!

-Baby Doll, 150 Crew

From The Beat: God has already blessed you with insight, courage and spirit, judging from this piece. It sounds like you're saying that part of living the street life was trying to get in where you can fit in, rather than having the courage to walk alone down the path of your own choice, which you're ready to do now. We don't doubt there's a relationship between your being in four foster homes before coming to juvenile hall — that is to say, the foster system didn't give you the guidance or love you needed, and you probably learned more from your peers than anyone else, learned, as you call it, street smarts. However, you've grown old enough, and even more importantly mature enough, to recognize that all that smart just ended you up here, again and again — and that's not smart. Well, we can't say it as well as you did, like when you say you don't want to be just "mean and cruel" but "sweet and sour" — yes! You truly have heart, girl! And we respect it! We hope your EM goes smoothly, and you make it this time. We know you're going to make it, so why not this time?

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

Losing My Grandfather

Losing my grandpa was one of the biggest tragedies in my life. Since he's been dead, my whole life has been different. Now I feel like I'm in the world all by myself.

I still have my daddy and my momma, but their love put together isn't strong enough to heal the pain in my heart. When he died, it felt like my sunny days was turning into darkness. My entire spirit was gone from my body. My happiness wasn't there anymore. My whole life had turned pitch black without my grandpa. I felt like life for me was coming to an end, and that's what's happening as I speak.

I lived in a big house with a big TV, but now I am living in an big institution, in a small room with no TV, and a man in a black robe is about to make a decision about my life. But if my grandpa was still livin', I wouldn't be in this situation at all. Without my grandpa, I am lost and trapped, with nowhere to go. My momma don't care, and my dad don't have any say-so.

Man, I miss my grandpa hella much! He's the only person who could save me from all this madness. This is the result of losing him. He was the key to my success. But like they say, fairy tales don't last for long — and now I understand.

-DeTay, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Your grandpa was no fairy tale. He was really here, in flesh and blood, walking the earth and showing you love. Maybe he can't give you money, 'cause in heaven he doesn't need any so he doesn't get any — but he can still give you love and guidance. You may ask how he can guide you since he's dead. Well, you still have somewhere in your heart and your head, everything he ever told you. But more importantly, you have that love in your heart that will hold you forever, if you just nurture it and never let it go. Also, we guarantee he will visit you in your sleep. When he does, pay attention, 'cause he'll tell you exactly what you need to do — 'cause being in a place like this is not you. Most simply put, you need to start showing yourself the love and giving yourself the wise advice your grandfather is still sending you from heaven above.

I miss my grandpa hella much! He's the only person who could save me from all this madness.

Used To Be

Used to be that guy you saw on the block
Choppin' rocks
Saggin' jeans so far down my waist
Guess you can say in my life I have made a lot of mistakes
But today is a new day, wake up everyday saying amen
Wondering if God is going to take me in
Under his wings
Forgiving my sins, that I commit everyday
Why does it have to be this way?
Used to be the guy waking up in endless dreams
Turned to the Lord when them times got tough
Bullied through streets, dog I pushed and shoved
Now I'm locked in a cell
Is God giving me a preview of hell?
Look into my eyes, and only one person can tell
The way I used to be
But God knows I've changed dramatically
Thank You God

-Dmitri, Durango Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: It's always good to remember that it is never too late to change! There are times where you may fall again, but don't ever stop getting back up, asking for forgiveness, and trying again to do things right. It's a great comfort to know that God will always forgive you too! Those mistakes you made are not in vain if you allow yourself to learn from them instead of repeat them. The mistakes we make are learning opportunities where we are allowed the choice of repeating them or growing from them.

Feelings

My feeling right now are very mixed
I'm happy, sad, envious, and pissed
My demon side been taking over lately
So for maybe five to six months I've been acting shady
They don't call me Lil' Shadow for nothing
I got nothing but pure darkness in my heart, cousin
But born Catholic, the Virgin of Mary
Thinking of my sisters, brothers, and the rest of my family is sad to me very
Me and my dad got beef, we had it for a hot minute
Rivals till death, some people got to feel this
Older homies and family members passing got me going crazy
But what about me, Lil' Shadow, nobody came to save me
These days so shady, but it feels like I got nothing to lose
Except the rest of my freedom, but I've been paying my dues
109 days in this institution
But knocking off days for my probation, I hope in the end it's a good conclusion
92 days left until I get off
December 27, 2006, just in time for New Years, be there when the new year jumps off
As of right now, nothing but full flames in eyes
Tell mi mama don't come up here 'cause I don't wanna see her cry
Mi hermano was here for a minute in unit B1
Lil' brother be safe out there, don't trip, just get off probation lil' bra
When I get out, we going dumb
Hitting up different cities like last time when Lil' Shadow was out lil' bra
I know you waiting on that baby, talk to her she doing good
Lil' Shadow going to be a uncle soon, so its all 'hood
Same goes for you, mi hermano, a padre y tio I can't believe it
I love mi hermano I can't wait for the baby I can't wait to see it
I just wish I won't take no bullets, but if I do just be it
'Cause we got enemies out there they run when we come
But me, I'm that demon boy, I put demons in your sleep like Lord's lost son
People know me as that bad-ass lil' ninja in the unit
The youngest, but I'm known for having pure corazon so I don't have to prove it
Getting put on more knowledge since I've been here
Dictionary, Bibles, so I only have to spit words to people, and it pierces through them like a spear
I've been thinking for a minute, 'cause I'm about to lose control
Mi manos is trembling so to stop them I got to hold
On the fast thing I got is my mind and my heart
If I would have used them in the beginning, I would have not been here for starts

-Lil' Shadow B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We wish you could put your very fine skills to use towards something more positive than this. We wish you could see just how much influence you have over your little brother, and therefore how much responsibility you will have to bear for the choices he makes. We wish that the new knowledge you've gained from dictionaries and the Bible would help prepare you to change your own life instead of boasting about using it as a spear. Sometimes, we read pieces like this and we think of our President. Even after four years of a disastrous War in Iraq, even after it's clear that we are pursuing a failed policy, even after thousands and thousands have lost their lives and that country is a catastrophe, even after the world has turned against us because of our actions, Bush says, "Stay the course." Isn't that the same thing you're saying when you write, "it's all 'hood" — even when part of that "all" includes the fact that you have allowed yourself to become a slave, the consequences of your own choices? Yes, slave. You put yourself in this status, and now you want to "stay the course." If ever there was a time for a course adjustment, now's the time.

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

I'm Walking

See when I get up outta here my door is already unlocked and its already open.

When I get out of here I'm going straight to Kaiser's Chemical Dependency, an out patient drug program, for 16 weeks and I'm going back to school.

I've already got some of my assignments off line and I already plan to spend the Thursday and Friday after I get out Wednesday talking to my teachers getting my assignments then doing a straight study hall Friday.

I plan to return to normal schedule the following Monday.

Also I've been talking to my younger sister, Dani, who's fourteen, and told her I really want to get back into softball and her travel ball team needs girls and my dads an assistant coach so it'll be a family thing.

Me my mom my sister and grandma are gonna start going to church on Sundays also!

My dude cheated on me since I've been in here I already said forget him and there goes my connection to my bad my habit, down the drain where it needs to be.

I've talked to about five of my old friends through my mom and letters; clean and sober friends that I miss and love and they forgive me for blowin them off for my boyfriend. They're as exited as I am to start kickin it again and welcome me back!

And don't think I think its going to be easy because I know its going to take a lot of hard work and determination but I want it and the door is already unlocked and open. I got the ones I love: my family and friends behind me and I just got to walk through it.

-Ney, 150 Crew

From the beat: Wow...it sounds like you have tons of support and people who care. We're glad you're feeling so positive and ready to move forward... Best of luck! Stay in touch!

"Stabbing Me In The Heart"

I told her I would do it, and I also promised her! Not many weeks later she passed away, she left me! I was crushed, torn apart, and I felt dead myself!
I didn't know what to do! How to react!
I could barely even cry!
I used her death as an excuse to break, a promise!
That was a terrible mistake,' cause now it's...
STABBING ME IN THE HEART!
I am now going to another group home!
I miss her so much, and this time I'm really going to do it!
Not because I promised her before and lied
but this time it's stronger than a promise ("I give her my word!"),
I love you Grandma Augie rest in paradise!
Also save me a spot! Love your grandson

-Loo, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Great writing! We've seen your writing change over the last weeks, and we're proud of how you're opening up. Thanks for sharing the loss of your Grandma with our pages. She would be honored and proud of you. Good luck in completing that group home too!

It's Up To Me

You are a person who thinks and knows your deal. Your heart is now dead, but don't let that stop you. The world is very hard, hard times come and go. I'm writing to you, pouring out my soul. I come from the projects on the east side of Phoenix where I ate Roman noodles due to our poorness. My life all messed up, but it's up to me to do right.

I do not need drugs to make me happy, but my gangbanging status could be bad for me. I think of my mother, a fatherless woman, who stood strong for her children, another fatherless generation. A father should be there, no matter what.

This life is not easy but it will get better. This life today full of drugs and guns, but remember this people...it's up to us.

-Jimmy, Durango Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: The only way you can fix what you have done is just to keep your head up and make the right decisions. You know what is right from wrong. We encourage you to hang around people who will support you in making the right decisions. The directions and paths in life we take are the sum total of our choices. We wonder what direction your life will take now that you have learned even more about life.

Woke Up This Morning

I woke up this morning thinkin' to myself, "Damn! Here we go again... the same shhh, different day." I'm tired of being in this place I want to go home and be with my family and my girl, just laid up watching TV or going to the mall to buy some shoes and clothes.

I love the outs so much I wake up every day saying to myself if I love the outs so much, why do I do stupid shhh to get locked up? And if I love my family and my girl so much, why do I do stupid shhh to be away from them? Damn! I got to think about that.

I'm gone till the next Beat. 'Till then, holla!

-Big Bills B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We like the questions you are asking yourself, but we'd be interested in the answers you give. What would it take for you to stop doing that "stupid shhh" that takes you away from the outs and those you love? We'd like to read your thoughts about that.

R-I-P My Brother Davon Ford

July 22, 2006: On that day I was at my aunt's house, and that's when I found out my brother had just died. I had to think about it, 'cause I was like, "My little brother can't be dead!"

I just had seen him a couple of hours earlier! He looked so happy, hopping around laughing! He was like, "Marcus, look at my new shoes!" I was really juiced for my brah.

My mom had told me to take him with me to San Leandro that day, but I said no — because he didn't like to listen to me. But now that's what I regret! I got a feeling that if I would have took him with me that day, he would still be alive today.

-Marcus, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Don't beat yourself up for not taking Davon with you that day. You had no way of knowing what was going to happen. It was not your fault. It is heartbreaking though to hear you describe him jumping around and showing off his new shoes only hours before his death! How did it happen? RIP Davon. Much love and respect.

Death Of Loved Ones Is Stabbing My Heart

When my cousin died and my friend was shot, my heart got this sharp pain. It felt as if it would never go away. The pain was so deep it made me feel weighed down. I couldn't function right for a day or two.

I couldn't sleep the first night my cousin was killed. I cried all that night. I woke up with an attitude and I was basically in my head that I was going to see him where he always hang out. But when he wasn't there, I had to realize my cousin — who was like a brother to me — was dead.

-George B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Your description of the way you felt when you lost these two people, especially your cousin, is very touching. How did you deal with that sharp pain, and how are you dealing with it now? Does the memory of your cousin's life and death affect the way you want to live your life?

RIP BO

they took my big bro' out of the game
it wasn't like he did hella bad stuff
he was about his money
the messed up part is one of our so-called patnas did it
he was like a big brother to me
he kept me safe, out of trouble
it hurt everybody that knew him
i wanted to do something about it
but his big bro kept me from doing and i didn't
but it was hard for me to sleep after that
when my lil' sis' got killed in 2003
he was there for me when nobody else was
so i wanted to say something about him
'cause that's my bro' forever
RIP Bo

-Lil' Joe, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Thank God for your big bro's big bro, 'cause that cycle of revenge never ends but goes 'round and 'round till everyone gets done in — killed or sentenced to life in the pen'. Your big bro's gone 'cause of a game that's all about killing, so kill the game in your heart and live a life that's fulfilling. That's what your big bro' would want for you, and so does the spirit of your lil' sister up in heaven with him, too.

Fighting My Case

Something that stabs me in my heart. Man the system tryin' to put me in jail for life for murder and attempted murder. Man they got me freaked up boy. I told them the truth but they don't believe me. I'm waitin' for my trial. I got to wait three weeks until I know what's up.

They chargin' me as an adult. I've been to court like 5 or 6 times for nothin'. I've been in max for about a week and a half now. It's cool, but some nasty ass food. That's all for now.

One love to my family, my lady, and especially my little bra.

-Mike, 150 Crew

From The Beat: In workshops you maintain with a smile, always calm, always turning in either an essay or some artwork, but you have this great turmoil that you're going through, and will keep going through over these next months, as you wait to see what your future will look like. What helps you stay strong through all this? What helps you maintain? Is it the knowledge of how many people love you and pray for you on the outs? Is it a belief in yourself? What makes you strong, and would you teach the rest of us how you do it? Hang in there. Your life will never be the same regardless of the outcome. It is up to you to make it better!

What I Will Miss

What I miss about home is my family because I have been away from them for more than six months

and when I go to Adobe I will be away from for one year. If I do good, then I will be in there until I'm 18

and I don't want to be away from my family that long. I miss my family because, they care about me

and I know they don't want to see me away from home that long. When I'm in jail I feel like I'm trapped and that nobody cares about me. But most of all that I feel the love that comes from my family and that. My mom told me if I hurt myself then think of who I'm hurting.

-Timothy, Durango Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Sometimes we don't realize how much we appreciate the people we love until we are separated from them. It is really hard to be separated from family for so long, but use this time while you're locked up to work on changing your life so you will not have to go through this kind of experience again. Let your love, for your family, motivate you to do well and live a positive life, so you can be there for them in the long run. Your time detained could be used positively to reflect on the things that are most important and when released you will be given the opportunity to show what and who is most important in your life.

Being A Worker

I woke up this morning feeling good because, today I was a worker.
Today was my first day as a worker and it was easy.
It takes your mind off a lot stuff
because you got something to do.
When you stay in your room all you can do is read, sleep, or read a book and probably listen to your radio.
Today was a good day except I got blisters on both of my feet.
I was exhausted from working out.
My feet hurt for the rest of the day.
I was limpin' the rest of the day.
It hurt so bad when I took a shower.
After the shower I just started reading my book.

-Michael, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Congratulations! We know being a worker is an honor. And blisters like other life pains often signal growing strength. Enjoy it.

Somebody's Someone

Do you ever feel down and out?
Knowing there's a friend without a doubt
Ones heart and mind which is captivated
The person who has demonstrated
What its like to be gang affiliated
A person who is very strong
The one who knows right from wrong
But still commits the crimes so long
Someone who needs a friend
Who that person will depend on
To be there 'till the very end
The one who lost someone important
We all mourn you at this moment
When you remember your person
The legacy you had when you left
We'll remember you homie through out your death
People live life to the fullest and know there's a will to keep strong and to keep on. Mourn the lost but don't let that hold you back stay strong always...always!

-Jimmy, Durango Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: It is a real hard thing to deal with when we lose someone very close. But we agree with what you said, mourn the lost, but don't let that hold you back. We can't let that hold us back from doing what we want with our lives. Some people have a great influence on our lives..... what has this person influenced you to do?

My Pride

My pride is what gets the best of me
so you see it ain't only me,
the person who you see
and think that shows anger and hate on the outside,
but it is really my pride from inside.
I can't take it when someone talks shhh and says my name, that's my damn pride inside that makes me go insane.
Some people tell me to walk away but I stand and fight.
But really I know that shhh ain't right.
Respect is what I gain but my pride still can't be tamed.
People have respect and pride mixed up and its a shame.
Some people take the time to understand
some just don't bother.
Respect is what you get,
but pride is what you have that makes you stronger.

-Sam, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Somewhere in this poem is mystery. It sounds like half the time pride is your ally, the other half it becomes your enemy. Pride is a great thing, it's what makes us stand tall, it's what makes us believe in ourselves when no one else will... but like you say in your poem, sometimes we let "pride" make us fight, bring us down... When you think about it – who cares if other people say your name or speak badly on you, if you know who you are and what's your worth?

Something That Is Stabbing Me

I can tell you what's stabbing me in the heart is when
me and my mom fell apart.
She died when I was only nine.
Now my life is being declined, that angered me and
drove me crazy.
It feels like the devil is trying to enslave me, now all I
do it sit back and cry,
because it hurts me from time to time.
I got nine siblings including myself.
People tell me to be there for my brothers and sisters
but I can barely be there for myself.
It's hard to survive because life's no joke.
The devil is tearing at everyone's throats, now tell me
is there any hope.
Most look at me wrong and tell me no,
this is just a man trying to survive so look at this note
and use it as a guide.

-A Kid, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The death of a parent can upset the path of a kid's life. It's real and legitimate. You've got a lot of pain and a lot of responsibility to deal with. We wish we could do more to help you through this hellish time. Keep up the faith!

You're Gone

I'm going off topic on this one. I just want to say: Once you're gone, you're gone, whether it's death or life in jail. It's been a while since I seen my ninjas that's done died or been in jail. I just hope I'm not next, but I pray everyday.

Sometimes I hope my ninja was not locked up, because I miss them ninjas! We ain't kicked it wit' each other for a minute. And when I do be able to see them, it's gon' be different. Time's gon' change. I might have some kids or be in college or with a nice job — or I might end up in there with them, doing twenty-five with an "L" because I done got down on some ninjas talking out the side of their mouth.

Or it could be worse, I could be dead; or left in the street, shot up on a late night, no witnesses, but I'm still alive and the reason the why I die is because the ambulance didn't come in time: and then I'm gone.

So let's make a change. We will be out soon. So let's see what we do with it. Because it's either the right way or the wrong way. Which one are you gon' go? — before you're gone. RIP my fallen homies.

-Sunny D, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Nice to see you back in our pages, you've been away, keeping busy at Camp we're guessing — it's all good, but we missed you. Still you come back right on target, 'cause the stakes are high. Too many of your friends already died or got locked away. Y'all deserve to have a normal life, with kids and a wife, a decent job, a home, the whole ball of wax! But you're right about the facts. If you choose to go the wrong way, there will be hell to pay sooner or later. We know you have the intelligence, character and ability to turn it around, and we hope your boys heed the sound of your words.

My Message

My message to you youngstas is
don't get mixed up in all this drama 'cause it
ain't cool.
Get caught up in yo' life. Stay positive,
don't be like me bustin' thangs, taking drugs,
nowhere to go.
Go to school.
Life is better over these walls.

-Lil' E, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We love that line! Get caught up in your life. You've coined a phrase.

Stabbing Someone In Their Back Can Change Their Life

My girlfriend is kinda stabbing me in the heart right now, because she is probably cheating on me, or probably doing something that I wouldn't do to her.

Sometimes I really look at her as a wonderful, beautiful lady, because sometimes I didn't really care about when people would tell me what she did — 'cause I cared about her! And I really wanted her and the whole world to know how I felt about her and what I though about her. Yet now I kinda think that her stabbing me in the back kinda brought me back to my normal life, and I can't take it no more!

So when I get out, I really want to have a conversation with her about how I feel and what I think about our relationship, because I want to go back to school and go to a group home or back to my own home. Whatever I do, I have to try and get myself back to normal, or do the things I used to do. I need to not be a follower but to lead people the right way and myself, so that I can be somebody when I get older!

But no matter how bad or how good I do, I have to remember to keep myself on track and don't worry about what people say. Because in the long run, I'm going to LOVE myself, no matter what. And when I get older I want to be a basketball player, or if not a basketball player, I want to help kids like me on day — or maybe make a big talk show about how kids or teenagers can change their way of life around before it's too late for them.

-Stella, 150 Crew

From The Beat: All of your future plans depend on your turning your life around now, now and after your release to a group home or your own home. Frankly, it sounds like the relationship that has your heart hurting was a bad one for you, at least insofar as it kept you from being your normal or do-right self. We don't know the details, but that's the impression we get from your piece. Also, it sounds like what you didn't want to believe when you were out, because it would have been too hard to stay with her if you did, you believe now. Yes, you need to have a conversation, but you know, from the past, that she knows how to win your confidence. The question is, does she persuade you to deny what you know to be true, or is she being true? Well, really, the more important question: Is she good for you?

For My Mom Who Gives Me Blessings and Care

Woke up this morning, and I feel so blessed that I have emotional support from my mom who is always there for me, even now that I'm in a bad place like jail. But what hurts me the most is seeing my mom crying, or just seeing the pain that I've caused her.

I want to change everything in the past. I want to be a grown man, like my family has never seen before! I want to support my family rather than hating on others. I want to be happy that my family is more important than my friends, because in the past I mistakenly picked my friends over my family.

Now I have a changed life. Before I hated life because I was confused over dumb stuff. But now I want to go to school and finish it rather than messing up, like skipping class and cussing out the teacher like I did in the past. If I turn back time, I would want to say I'm sorry for all the mishaps.

I want to say thanks to my mom, because if my mom was not there for me, I would still be on the street, doing drugs or alcohol — but now I've realized that drugs kill! So now I'm a changed man. I want to say, "Wow! Life is easier than drugs and alcohol." Thanks, Mom, for changing my life.

Also I love myself for writing a deep story, because I've been touched by others — that's why I want to be a writer. And I want to say thanks to the staff members here and to my family members who helped me through this ordeal that I've been dealing with.

-Wayne, 150 Crew

From The Beat: There's no doubt that your heart is in the right place! You've learned a lot that has changed your heart. And all change of behavior begins with making a decision to change your behavior. Maybe you should make staying drug (alcohol is a drug, too) free your top priority so that you can hold on to this new clarity of mind that you have attained. No drugs, no matter what. Then focus on all these other goals you have set for yourself in the outside world. Thanks for another inspiring peace. Now do the deeds.

Pain

I always sit in my cell, the same 10 by 8 inches of
hell with nothing to do but reminisce about all of the
things that I miss,
trapped in dreams of momentary bliss and yet
awakened by nightmares
of bullets that barely miss.
Still living a constant struggle
just trying to be great and yet I'm staring at this
as my mind starts to debate, which emotion takes over
from here?
As my heart leans towards hate
it seems like I'm about to seal my own fate and yet all I
can do is wait,
while the system moves me into checkmate,
serving me another nasty county plate,
but I'm hungry so I don't complain.
I learned by watching others
try in vain and yet their complaining still drives me
insane,
constantly causing hurt but I take it
because I look out of the brain,
that's why I go to court in shackles and chains
with a prayer so I can get out and feel the rain
and maybe it will wash away all of my pain.

-Young L, 150 Crew

From The Beat: A beautiful poet has landed in the pages of The Beat! Keep describing the pain that so many Beat readers share and you will contribute to so much healing.

My Family History

My family is from the large island called "Philippine." My family is from Manila, it's the capital city of the Philippines. But my family is still poor in the Philippines and that's why I want to be successful in the United States — so I can give money to them.

I have three half-sisters and one half-brother on my mom's side, but a different dad. But my mom told me last year that I have a half-brother in my blood. I didn't know that. I was confused. But whatever, I'm still mad at why my dad left my mom. In total I have seven siblings. I was born in big family.

Compared to family back in the Philippines, my mom here in the USA is rich! That's why my family in Manila is asking for cash. One of my half-brothers whom I never knew, has a president for a dad though! And my grandma has a house in the Manila area. I'm happy that my family doesn't live in a hut. If I had enough money, I'd bring all of them here to the USA, so than could live a happy life rather than a poor life. My sister and brother came here in the mid-nineties. It was fun!

My family is completed with six little babies in my extended family; I mean, nephews and nieces. I've been an uncle since I was eleven years old! But ever since my grandpa died, my mom fell apart from the rest of my family. And that part of my family story hurts me the most.

-Wayne, 150 Crew

From The Beat: That money you see in the street though is like fool's gold, 'cause it gets you locked up like a fool in a place where not only are your pockets not full — you don't even have pockets. So remember when you get back out, that a good steady part-time job is way better, even if it doesn't look like as much money at first. For in the end, when you learn how to save, the fact that you can keep making money without surrendering your freedom, will make you, too, rich compared to your family in the Philippines, just like your mom. And when you get older, why not? You can have more family members come to the USA and make better pay. Just change your playgrounds, playmates and playthings, and you're well on your way to a better day in the U S of A.

The Knife In Me Is "We"

a knife in my heart
when we are apart
it hurts so deep
but yet
it helps me think
not about a guy, not about a pet
but about my brother and sister
whom i love to death
and about the person who gave me
my very first breath
in the hospital of merritt
my very one maid
until i hit the fourth grade
that's when jenny went astray
then i got real bad when i hit seventh grade
that's when my mom went insane
just like panda when she got sent away
then she came back in the eleventh grade
we continued to do the same
then my brother joined our parade
because over the last couple of years
my mom's been pulled every which way
trying to hold us pack of strays
but we all run off, and return after dark
after getting drunk and kickin' it
at the little park
but come to think about it
it's not my heart
it's my m—o—m
and i'm sorry
it took me so long
to see all my wrongs
and to notice that i am that knife
and when i get home
i'm gonna show you right

-Jenny, 150 Crew

From The Beat: No one took the knife metaphor to the place of revelation that you do here — seeing in the end that the knife in your heart and your mom's went where you steered. We're not saying you're responsible for when your mom lost it and had to be institutionalized to get her head right. It sounds like your dad was never there, and then you had four years without your mom (not to mention how weird for a child to know Moms went crazy and couldn't take care of your or herself). That's a load to put on anyone's shoulders, but the three children acting bad and seeking chemically induced insanity (or at least inanity), only makes it all worse. We can't praise you enough for seeing that your mom is back and doing her best — so now you're ready to do yours too and see if it helps your mom, yourself and the rest of you. Actually we'd say, it's guaranteed to; but bottom line, the only one you can take care of — is you!

Have Faith

I'm sittin' here tryin' to get through this day,
On this September sunny day,
Thinking 'bout my moms word,
That's dropping in my mind like bombs,
I know it will save me,
Save me from the D-A's words
I just wish things could go my way,
That there is going to be a brighter day,
So all I could do is have faith,
In God, my family, and friends,
That they're praying for me,
To get free,
And I'm hoping that they think,
My brighter day is comin' soon,
Besides being in this bootsy cage.

-Rome, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Things will go your way, and there will be a brighter day. This is a challenge time for you, don't shy away from it.

Drugs, Alcohol, Me and My Parents

I think I can talk in a way that other people will listen and understand me, but it seemed like whenever I'd try to talk to my parents about something, they wouldn't listen to me. Now I realize that when they were sober, then they would talk to me and understand what I'm going through.

I'm not trying to say that I don't like them or I don't love them, because I do. I love my parents with all my heart. I try not to be mean to them, but they do irritate me so much sometimes — well, only if I'm high. I mean I recognize that when I'm not high, I'm not mean to them 'cause they don't irritate me as much as when I'm high. I think sometimes I get high and I'm mad at someone else on the streets, but I see my parents and I take it out on them.

Or sometimes I get mad when I'm not high, and it's probably when I've run out of drugs and so I get very angry. Then sometimes when I got it, I'm all happy with everybody.

-Angie, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** It's pretty clear that alcohol and drugs play a big part in your family interactions. We're not sure what you mean by when your parents are sober though. Do you mean like sober at the time, or do you mean "in sobriety", which is to say, not drinking at all for at least an extended period of time? 'Cause addiction, to alcohol or any other drug, is defined by obsession and compulsion (you can't stop thinking about it when you don't have it and you can't quit when you can have it). So, yeah, you can be irritable related to the addictive cycle when you're not high, and you can feel "happy with everybody" (for a minute or an hour or whatever) when you are. Or, you can be high, angry and frustrated, just as you say (and the street where you presumably get yours is not a nice place, there is a culture of aggression: mean, cruel and nasty). From your piece, we'd strongly recommend you try getting clean and sober, and see how it goes, whether or not your parents do the same. Have you ever been to a young persons' AA or NA (twelve-step) meeting? Try it. The steps can teach you how to be clear-headed and happy at the same time! Thanks for your serious meditation on drugs and relations — good work!*

Every Scar

Every scar that I have, has a story to it. For example, ones on my head came from a baseball bat. You ask how I got them and what I was doing and all that, right?

Sometimes I use my scars to scare little kids by teaching them what can happen when you play in the street. A lot of people make fun of my scars, but I always tell myself, "What didn't kill me, always can make me stronger." I used to tell myself that God gave me another chance at life so I can do better.

Until next week, it's your crazy uncle, Fairlas, telling you to keep your head up if it's down.

-Fairlas, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** We thought scars called for respect, but then fools will try to make fun of anything that's different or unusual about anyone, regardless. Forget them! (We now that when you're down or frustrated, that's easier said than done.) Don't stop telling yourself that God's giving you a chance to live a better life — it goes for the incidents that scarred you, and also for this experience at Camp ('cause as lock up goes, this is easy). Don't let the street life or the homies suck you back into trouble.*

L.I.F.E

i woke up this morning glad
that another day was gone by
and i am a day closer to going home
a day closer to seeing my mom and my girl
a day closer to being free
a day closer to getting my life back
the end
love. I . for. ever.

-Lil Jacob, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** You need to love yourself before you can show love to anyone else. But what does that really mean? Show yourself the kind of love a wise father would give a son in his fondest dreams — which means too, give yourself good advice and then follow through.*

Why Must You Be Unfaithful To Women?

Men! You shouldn't listen to your selfish heart. It doesn't really have a brain besides keeping you alive. Its existence is in vain. "How could I be so mean, and say your heart has no place!" because moral men fall in love again as fast as they change their face. I may be cruel, but think awhile about the hearts that you have broken. Match that with the empty vows and broken promises you've spoken.

I am not saying females are perfect because men we know its not true by why must you be unfaithful if her heart is true to you!!

-G-Love , 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** You're a brave and cool man to ask other men about this weakness. It's so common, and it hurts our families and it hurts us. Thanks for speaking up!*

Woke Up This Morning . . .

Woke up this morning thinking about my little bra and how he was waking up in his facility (YA). Then the thought of how the crimes and scams have passed down the family tree and ended me and my bra once again in the hands of the state. Never before have I thought that my many crimes would be mimicked by my younger brothers.

The early morning had me thinking about my situation. The worries and the many doubts fill my mind. Then once again I'm sidetracked by the thought of my current case. The many charges and how they tryna wash me. They tryna keep me incarcerated and that's the end. So as I was told by my attorney, it's a rap.

-Vago B4, SF/YGC

***From The Beat:** It must be a heavy burden to realize that you were the model for your younger brothers who have now followed you into slavery... But then, you can't hold yourself totally responsible since you, too, were following a path that others set down before you. But it's not just your brother you've led into harm's way, it's also yourself. You say the system is trying to wash you, but you gave them the soap and the stripped yourself naked for them to do as they choose. They may keep you incarcerated for more time, but you won't be incarcerated forever. Are you making any plans and preparations for when that day comes? Are you thinking about what you need to do (and what you need to stop doing) that will keep both you and your brothers free? We hope so, because if you don't plan for your own future, you can be sure that someone else is making those plans for you.*

That Love

you know we can be
emotionally alone inside
we gon' find that special someone
to combine
everything you have
someone is looking for the same
whenever you do find someone
please remain
people make mistakes
don't let go
forever is the name
hold before letting go
kiss until the passion grow
until you know
that love is fo'ever complete
somebody is feeling the same
rather have rain instead of summer
everything that you remember
lovin' each other more and more
acceptin' each other's past
and helping each other's future
for the best
somebody feels what i'm saying
'cause it's my heart
and it confessed

-Tae, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** You words sang a sweet song, even if the reader's voice was all wrong that night in the Hall. But now your words stand on their own and speak to each reading in a room all alone. Now you know some feel your words and feel it strong.*

What's up Beat?

Just wanna say what's up to ya
and send my respect to you guys
for comin' by this week and givin' us
the opportunity of listenin' to
what we have to say —
and also for giving us
these subjects to think and write about,
'cause without you guys,
none of us would be thinking 'bout any of this.
And for some people, it really helps them out.

-Question Mark, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Right on. And thank you for showing respect not just to us but to each other. But now, it sounds like you're saying none of this is going to help you reconsider the choices you're making. Man, we hope and pray you see the light one day — at least one day before the ish hits the fan. Much love and respect.

Back

Well here I am back in jail. I never thought
that I would be. I tried to do the right thing
but it was hard for me to do the right thing.
I just have to learn how to change my life
around and stop hangin around the wrong people
and be me. I am very inflowing and when somebody is
doing something and somebody be like, "Jillian, I bet
you aint going to do it, you scared" and I would be
like
"I want to" and they would be like "you want to?"
And then I'm if I had
never hung out with those people I wouldn't have
been here.
Do not come to jail
Hang around the right people
don't do nothing wrong that you know that you is
going to get in trouble for
Got to school and graduate and go to college

-Jillian, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We understand that hanging out with the wrong people can get anyone into trouble, but we also need to take responsibility for our own roles in the drama of our lives—that's the only way to really work toward change. It sounds like you're on that path, and we hope that you make it through you list all the way to college. When you do make it that far, what do you think you'll feel when you think back to this time in your life?

The Door To A Positive Life

Well if you are reading this you must have walked through the negative door, but I'm going to direct you towards a couple of positive ones.

One thing you can do is surround yourself with people that are willing to tell you that you wrong. That is a true friend. I'm not saying to get rid of all your old friends 'cause that's hard. But I am saying add to your list.

Another thing to do is don't do anything that puts you at stake of losing what you want. Whether it's money, jewelry or your freedom. I say that because you may get mad at a mistake you've made and then take that anger out in the wrong way and end up back in here.

One last thing I can say is discipline your self and also believe in your self. If you say your gonna fail, well then you are. But if you keep thinking you are someone, then you will stay out.

-Sikaka, 150 Crew

From the beat: Wow, this is some really good advice. It seems like you're talking about the power of intention and how important it is to be positive in the face of adversity, which is never easy. We hope you take your own advice and also pass that good stuff on to the rest of our readers.

R.I.P Armon Dante G.

pants low, hat leanin'
chicks on me, like crack they feenin'
chain on neck and at the bottom of the shirt r i p mezzy
you could tell he was a star
because his silas was gleamin'
boy got his block's respect
ninja he banged his set next town where i'm from
lil' mezzy was my brah
he grew up in my town now that what's up
"r" stands for "rest"
"i" stands for "in"
"p" stands for "paradise"
i love you armon

-Lil' Larry, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We respect your desire to praise a young man who lived life like his hair was on fire, but we hate to see a youngster coming up dying to be called a star with his name on a Tee. All the things you praise here as proving he was "real" are the same things that set him up to die young. You feel? It's tragic to see so many live life like their fate of an early death is sealed. RIP to all those who died too young and needlessly.

Back Again

Here I am back again in these four walls again.
This time I'm back with a new charge,
Now most likely I'm going to a group home
because I messed up at home.
I have to suffer my consequence that my decision had made
so I can't be mad.
Now I have to make a plan for myself
so I won't come back again.
Make my decision wisely.

-Pebbles, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's great that you are connecting the decisions you've made with the reality you're in right now. That means that you can make new kinds of decisions to get yourself on a more positive track. We hope you do that and wish you all the strength you need.

What Key Do You Think You Need To Unlock That Door?

The key to open my door is really far
Away from where I'm at...
I was arrested Sept. 15, 2006.
Until this day it's been eleven days
Since I've been locked up.
I've had two court dates and they haven't let me go.
I got two more weeks 'till my next court date
so I have to wait but I look at it as another day
of my life and I have to focus so the hours could pass by fast
and then get through the night.
This is what happened to me and how I got here.
I was arrested for false things.
They thought I was doin' prostitution
when I really know I wasn't and then because I lied
to the police when I was really a runaway.
So now I'm here locked up
and I just can't wait to get out and go home.
I want to get out of here and go to school
start a new life without coming back here
or running away from home
there's no place like home.
So to tell you the end of my story:
YGC changed me for good.

-Lisamar, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What do you focus on to pass the time? Many people come out of being locked up with a new-found spirituality or sharpened mind. Do you focus on being positive? On learning new things about yourself and the world we live in? Books? We're curious to know about the things you think about. And we are also curious to find out what is going to keep you free upon returning home?

Beat Within

Well here I am back in the hall. When I just recently got out in August. I said I wasn't coming back but then again I've said that all the other times I've been here too.

This time is different because I'm going to my first group home. My plan is too complete the program and go home.

I miss my family so much. What I need to do is change the people I hang out with. If I really want to make a change that's what I need to start with...the crowd I hang out with. I know this group home is a good thing because it will help me change. I need to be at home with my family not locked up all the time. I want to make a change.

This is not how I want to live coming back and forth. I wanna be normal not having to worry about the cops, my po, and court, the judge etc... it's never too late to change ...

To all locked up keep your head up be strong. Much love and respect to all.

-Maggie, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What about group home do you think will be different for you? We're really glad that you want a different life for yourself and know that if you want it like you say you do, it's they for you to take it.

How To

be positive in life
go to school
follow the rules
don't break the law
listen to you mom
play sports
have something positive
to look forward to
join a soccer team
a basketball team
something that's going to keep you
in a positive mind set
that's how you' going to
stay away from trouble and police
plus you always just going to do good
plus you have a good job
and something good to support your family
if you have something to look forward to

-Lil' Caps, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It may not be easy, but it is simple. And if you keep it simple, you make it that much easier. For sure, you need to put some fun in your life, 'cause if you have nothing to look forward to, you won't stay with the good life long. But the longer you live that positive way, the easier it gets to stay that way 'cause things get better every day, even if it takes years for your dreams to come true.

Grandma

One day this girl said something that made me think. I cried 'cause it was true to me; the same thing she said was going on in my life. I argued with this woman, yelled at her, cursed at her, talked about her, made her disappointed. But I cry, and I think every time I'm in trouble she's in my corner and I love her for that. That great wonderful lady is my grandmother. God forgive me for being disrespectful.

-Monay GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: If you are truly regretful for all that you've put your grandmother through — and we can tell that you are — you are already beginning to rebuild respect. The best way to make up for your past is to redefine your future so you can spend it at home with your grandma.

Get It the Way You Live

This to my lil' ninjas out there, gettin' it how they live. It don't matter if the hustling, pimping, hitting licks, as long as they gettin' it. When you get caught, don't think it ain't yo' fault, 'cause it is.

Just think of it like this: You missed too many lay-up's in a game. So now you got to sit. Take time while you down to look at yo' mistakes. Make a better plan, even if you do the same shhh. Next time, make sure you run quicker, or don't make the mistake of being dumb. If you got a chance to get out on probation, take it. Make the best of a bad situation.

Is your freedom really worth a purple blunt? Or a pill? Man, if you think it is, something is disturbing you and you need help. Take it from me, that shhh ain't worth it. Life has more to offer. When things are looking bad, think about what you have to be thankful for, like being able to breathe, see walk, talk, run. It's too many things.

Look at it like this: don't look at you, look at yo' family members, yo' loved ones. The people who are depending on you to be there when no one else can be. Keep it solid with yo'self. Be a real ninja.

-Al-boo, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The second half of this piece especially, spits some real wisdom that we hope influences our young readers decisions. But now that first part about going back to doing what you were doing before you got caught up. Nah, it won't work. First of all, most of the time you get caught up for something that comes at you sideways 'cause of the situations your life style puts you in. And the only way out of that is to change your life style. When it comes to the street game, all those who play sooner or later get played. Or put it like this, the game gets played out. Maybe it worked when you were a little guy, but the stakes get high as you get older, and the time gets longer. All we're saying, Al-boo, is don't go back to the grind and you won't have to come back to do anymore time.

School vs. Home

i think we treat strangers better
because they are there
when you have problems in school
and your loved ones are sometimes
so busy working that you can't really talk to them

-Billy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You really opened our eyes with this honest and accurate appraisal.

RIP Mezzy

Maaan, what's up, Beat! I'm back in here for a little violation, but I'm 'bout to get out in a minute though. Man, stuff ain't been the same since Meech and Mezzy died. Ninjas been funkin wit' each other and wit' other ninjas.

When Mezzy died, I was on the other side of town messin' wit' this female. Then I got that call that Mezzy had died in a shoot-out wit' some rivals and wit' some otha ninjas from a next block. I was hella mad! I left dat girl's house and went straight to Highland Hospital, but by the time I got there my ninja was already gone!

When Meech died, I was done! I didn't care about nothin' anymore! That's the second ninja that died from my block, and he died in the worst way. He was just walking down to the store, and when he came out the store, a truck or a van came by and started bussin' and hit Meech in the head!

He was still livin' for a minute. but the ambulance took top long. So he died. Ever since them two events, my life haven't been the same. RIP Meech and Mezzy.

-Lil' Quise, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You've got to make the decision to get yourself up out of that street life, 'cause it's just too many dying. The streets aren't safe anymore, so get off them and into a schoolhouse, or an after school job. You tell us. What else can you do besides wait to be the next one to get shot down in a turf war? No, it isn't the same after your friends die in the street. So don't do the same old same. It's time to change. RIP Mezzy and Meech.

Me

a young hustla, grills to girls, they love me
like what's really good
a oakland lova', gettin' by the pound
buryin' paper in the ground
stayed thuggin' through the ups and downs
the main objective, yep, thought i held the crown
a young man of seventeen makin' it happen
been stopped chasin' dreams
it was just how i was moving
didn't believe in losing
the knowledge i'd snatched off the shelf
best believe i used it to get wealth
nobody out there playin'
and we sho' don't grow complacent
i'm reapin' this struggle called life
by metal and colored ice
turfing it, deep in the streets
i thought i was working it,
a tycoon off hella balloons
never did get to jumping the broom
thought i had it from june to june
back in the streets where i'm from
bound fo' trouble popped my bubble
and now i'm here in juvie prison
[to be continued]

-Clyde, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This is your wake-up call, 'cause that was all just your set up to fall. And you got lucky 'cause you're still breathing, and God gave you another chance at healing from that disease called the streets, where the more you were doin' the more you were losin' your sanity. Take a minute now and make a plan to be different after your release, 'cause street game brought you to your knees, and it's the perfect position from which to pray, "God, please, free me from my own insanity that I may enjoy my own humanity in freedom and peace." Amen.

The Last Five Months

I want to go home. I'm tired of going through the same stuff everyday. Yoga? I hate yoga! I feel it is not helping us in no way! That's just how I feel. I think the supervisors could have come up with a better program than yoga. I need something educational, something I can benefit from — instead of "watch your breath"!

I don't like also how people put titles on me. They don't understand. So how can they judge? I like my therapist though. I feel that she can really help with a lot of issues. And now that I have my plan together, I'm ready to move on, instead of being stuck around a lot of immaturity. That's just how I feel. I think I'm grown. Others probably don't look at me that way, but I do. I've paid bills, had a job, love life, car, a lot of responsibility that a grown woman go' through.

I get tired of people telling me when I can go to the bathroom or not. I'm ready to do me. As I've been here for the last five months, I know now that good things come to those who wait. The next six to eight months, I'm just hoping that I'm able to control myself and don't sweat the small stuff; don't keep counting the days down but take every day one by one; and just still have this frame of mind when I am released.

Keep faith in God, and I know nothing will be too hard for me to achieve. I learned the more I pray and put the situation in God's hands, he will lead me to sweet success. It's a shame I had to come to jail to find God, but I think like, "Maybe this is my wake-up call." Well, I know this is my wake-up call! I have not time to waste, and I have a lot of time ahead of me, and I got to get it together.

I just hope that this time hurry up and pass, because I need to start my future on the outs. I woke up this morning and asked God to make today better than yesterday.

-Aleshia, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You're doing great. You have learned a lot. The issue to deal with is how you handle yourself when you get frustrated or angry? Because that's when you'll be most tempted to throw away this hard-earned positive attitude. Also when those with power over you don't seem to recognize the progress you've made and how well you're doing, but then that's probably just another example of something that's frustrating. Still, it's not whether anyone else sees it, but whether you know it's true, for a fact, and whether you can take pride in your accomplishments in reality and not just in the opinions of others which you know can be manipulated. I guess we're saying, take pride in the true progress you're making, even if only you and God fully recognize the truth of it. As for being "grown", well even grown people have plenty to learn (and your love life, whatever it's been, does not make you grown — but handling responsibility wisely does indeed). Again, keep up the good work and the good attitude that goes hand in hand with it (or is it your hand in God's hand?).

Learned My Lesson

Every day I pray to another day; and wish I could get out of juvenile hall; and wish I could make it back home as soon as possible. I tell God how much I want to see my family and be home and be a free man.

When my court date comes, I hope the judge will release me. That would be tomorrow! And I hope that the person I'm in here doing time for hurting, will respect me and forgive me for not telling all that.

I know I'm in here for a reason. My wish is just not to come back here or see jail ever again in my life. I've learned my lesson — to watch who I hang with and be a better man than I was.

-John, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You can't change without a desire to change, that's for sure. And it sounds like you are on fire with a desire to change your life, once you get back home. This terrible time will turn out to be a good thing if you really have learned your lesson, because it is a lesson that will serve you well for the rest of your life — if you stay true to what you've learned.

To My Brother

Damn, people say they your homie, but when you get locked up, it's a different story. Look, there's only one person that I respect these days an' that's my brother, an' I ain't going to say his name, but I know that he would die for me in so many ways.

Look, bra, I love you, no matter what you say. Damn, I think about you every day. When you're gonna come home, bra? Be with your family in peace. For we can be in a car two deep-- getting females an' being in a place where you want to be. But stay up, bra, an' we're gonna be home in peace.

-Lil' Rider B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Maybe it's when you're locked up you get to see who your real homies are. Do you have anyone standing with you, visiting you, supporting you? Are you writing about your older brother? How long has he been "gone"? Do you suppose, when he thinks of you being locked up here, he is writing the same sort of message to you? We love the goal of being "home in peace," and we hope that you both will find it.

What's Killing Me Inside

I have a lot of things stabbin' me in the heart, but the one thing that gets to me is that I have left my sister out there all alone. She is with her family, but I'm not there with her, and she's in a place where they prey on the young.

That's the only thing that kills me inside. I would love to see her. I would do anything! I don't want her to grow up like me, so I have to be there — or someone will convince her that wrong is right and right is wrong. That's why I'm tryin' my best to do good. So I can get back to her and give her everything she wants and needs. I love my little sister with all my heart!

-Cash Money, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We feel the love in your heart, the unconditional love you have for your sister. And we congratulate you on making that into a motivation to do good in here, but don't let it stop here! If you don't want her to be like you — in the past — then you have to change yourself in the present and future. What she wants and what she needs may not always be the same thing you know. She may want things that cost money she doesn't have, but what she needs is a brother out there doing good and watching out for her. You feel?

First and Then

First are apostles, second are prophets, third are teachers, then those who do miracles, those who have the gift of healing, those who can help others, those who can help others to work together, those who speak in unknown languages. Everyone is not an apostle: you have to love first. Don't let evil get the best of you but conquer evil by doing good.

God already had a fight with the false prophets, and we all have good spirit inside us. I will not be afraid, because God is going to be right there with me. It is promised in the Bible: You will live under a government that is just and fair. Your enemies will stay far away. You will live in peace. Terrors will not come near you.

-Travis, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Thanks for these words of hope. As far as who's first and who's second, etc., remember these words from the Gospel: In heaven, the first shall be last and the last shall be first. And again: May it be on earth as in heaven. Amen.

Nobody Told Me The Truth

When I was nine or ten, I found out that one of my favorite uncles was sick. My father and other uncles told me that my uncle was sick. I asked my dad what was wrong with my uncle, an' he told me it was nothing serious. After that, I had to go see my uncle in a casket, laying dead. I felt that not knowing what was wrong with my uncle was hard. I was very mad at my dad because he didn't tell me anything that would have helped me at least know why he died.

-Jose B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Sometimes parents and other adults think they're doing kids a favor by not telling them everything, because they sincerely don't want to hurt you. They think they're "protecting" you. But, when you find out, you feel wounded in another way. Of course, sometimes they think they are protecting themselves from "shameful" diseases (that could be cancer or West Nile Virus). Have you learned the real story about your uncle's death? Have you been able to talk to your dad about the way you felt? Can you? What do you remember about your uncle that made him so special to you?

Woke Up This Morning

Woke up this morning feeling like I was going to get out of jail. I woke up and brushed my teeth, went to school for 15 minutes, then I went to court. I sat down in the chair then I turned around and seen my mom walk into the court room. F

My probation officer started to tell the judge I was in there for my reasons. My attorney really didn't say nothing 'cause he just reviewed my case this morning and he said he needed more time. My probation officer told the judge my mom had to say something. Then my mom stood up and said, "I really think she needs more time 'cause she's outta control and don't want to listen and I think this will teach her a lesson." I looked at my mom with a serious look, then I told myself I was glad for the choice she made, 'cause if it wasn't for her saying that I would be somewhere doing a lot of stuff that I really am too young for.

Although as much as I don't want to be here, I know I can't do nothing. But hey, I put myself in this position so I am gonna have to take myself out, 'cause if it wasn't for this I will be putting myself at high level risk.

-Rosie GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Thank you for being honest with us Rosie. A lot of people would be mad at their parents for saying something like that in court, so it look like the little girl who was out of control and didn't want to listen has already matured into a young woman who recognizes that she needed to be checked, and appreciates her mother for doing it. It seems like you have turned a corner in your mind, and that's the most important corner to turn. Think about what you want it life and set some goals for yourself to achieve when you get out.

What I Gotta Do . . .

I know what I gotta do
But it's hard, because when you love someone
You overlook the bad qualities he has
And focus on the nice things he says and does for you
So you think and think about him
And you miss him 'til you're in tears
And then you find out about all the lies he been tellin'
And you beat yourself up for believing him in the first place
I know what I gotta do
But I don't want to break what we made
In fear of never finding the love we have again
Lies, heartbreak and drugs
Callin' him and askin' him if he been sober
"Yeah, Baby, of course,"
Talkin' a million miles a second
"You been tweakin' again?"
"Naw, Baby, I told you, I'm sober"
But you already know...

-Lady Heather, Marin

From The Beat: You know nothing good comes of trusting the lies you're being told by someone you love, but it's scary because if you object, you can lose him and that love entirely. So you accept the lies, cover up for them, excuse them... But you know in your heart that finally you're going to have to stop the nonsense or you'll end up really unhappy or nuts yourself. It's really up to you—can you live with him while he drinks and/or uses drugs? If so, it's on. If not, there's no use pretending you can. Is what you gotta do is leave him? Do you think you'll be okay without him? We hope so. We think this will also save you, given this is the kind of person that will keep you down.

Down The Way

At the age three I lost my dad to lung cancer. My dad was a father to my older brother even though I was not his son. My father had four kids, two sons and two daughters. My father was thirty-four when he died. First he was stabbed three times. When he got to the hospital, after four hours of surgery, he was then diagnosed with cancer. A few months later he died, and my whole life was messed up, moving from house to house, and my family went all different ways.

-Boom B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Losing your father or mother at any age is difficult, but it must have been particularly difficult under these circumstances. How did it mess your life up? What do you mean your family went in different ways? Do you mean that your father was like the glue that held everything together? If he were here, what would he be telling you to do with your life?

Family

We have friends and family
Well at least that's how it starts
We wish it could stay that way
But tomorrow it's a new day
Your friends become enemies
And your family die
All this pain shows life isn't a game
I love my friends and it's hard to let them go
But sometimes you have to when they put you in the danger zone
My grandma told me I have no friends
And even family is scarce
But I always wanted both because life is hard when you're alone
Friends are like family in some little ways
They stick around and soon they're gone
And we're on to the next page
It's hard to understand how it can happen like this
But we can't change it, that's just the way it is

-Lashonda GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Friends and families are both important and no one would mind having both. But change is a part of life, and people don't always stay with us throughout life. We hope your grandmother was wrong when she told you that you have no friends. It's true that real friends are few and far between, but they are still real friends.

Life Hurts

Why does life hurt so much? Because tribulations have caused it to be. People dying and that just leaves mothers crying. My homie got killed this past August, and to tell you the truth, if I wasn't at Log Cabin Ranch, I might have killed for him. But when you look at it, life hurts. Just living can make a person want to kill themselves, make them hurt other people because how they're feeling at the time.

Why does life hurt? I feel that right now life is getting the best of me, but I'm a born winner, so I got to come out on top. Sometimes when you feel like you can't go on, just think about someone who inspires you. But when you living life, the realities of things that happen around people could have a bad effect on them.

Like me, I could go to college and play sports, but, on the other hand, I be in the streets and got beef, so when I get out of the Ranch, I have to find, I mean I have to right away snap back into a survival mode, 'cause I got to make sure that I make it out there. Because I'm trying to make sure that I don't end up dead, because that would have my grandmother real hurt. Life hurts, though. But I'm just trying to stay out the way. Keep yo' head up. RIP, Chedda B.

-Cash Money LCRS, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You totally have our hearts for the death of your homie. We know you're hurting. Being at the Ranch, will give you a time out, a chance to deal with your pain, and think hard about the best way to handle his death, your lifestyle. How can you honor your friend, learn from his death? Maybe by reconsidering going back to any situation that means that you have to go into a survival mode? Why not be good to yourself and your precious life? Stay out of any mess, and in his name live a life free of the violence! It can be done! Be a leader.

Why We Treat Strangers Better Than Loved Ones

W'at it do, Beat readers? How's that vida treating y'all? This Goofy once again, still up in max.

Well, let's get down to bizz. I think that the reason people treat strangers better than loved ones is because when we meet strangers we do simple thing like hold the door open for this lady or help that old lady with taking the groceries to her car. You know? When people see me in the streets the first thing that comes to their mind is, "He's a criminal, a gang member or a hustla." That's why I speak to people or strangers with manners 'cause that first impression sometimes means a lot.

I'm with my loved ones every day, so they see me go through good times and hard times. I can't lie, I don't always do the simple generous things like I do with strangers. Well, another reason I treat other people better than my loved ones is because I keep my loved ones close and my enemies closer. They might not know w'at up, like for example, one of my boys snitches on me. I do time. I'ma act cool with him so he don't suspect nothing. Then one day we gone kick and he's gonna get w'at's coming to him. He got caught slippin' 'cause he trusted me and bam. Well keep trucha y al rato.

-Goofy B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Oh, Goofy, you have so much going for you that when we read the end of your piece (about what would happen if one of your "boys" snitched on you), we just shake our heads and hope that you can put your two halves together and become one whole person. (You know the halves we're talking about: The one with the excellent brain who understands where his life is leading and wants something different; and the one who still thinks of his gang, his turf, his boys.) The best way for strangers not to think of you as "a criminal, a gang member or a hustla" is to be none of those things. We look at you with such hope — and with such fear. So much depends on which course you take.

My Life In Eleven Bars

let's rewind to the times when i was doin' crime
every time i see knock i try to throw 'em a dime
when i see five-oh i hit a gate
tryin'a get money so i start moving weight
it ain't no fun, sixteen, on the run
i'm goin' off hype, so i stay wit' a gun
rewind my life, man i wish i could
now they got me locked up, but it's still all good
life ain't here forever, so i'm'a live it to the fullest
i wanna dodge balls
i don't want to dodge bullets
can i throw rocks instead of throwin' 'em to fiends
if i could i would rewind everything

-Lil' Eli, 150 Crew

From The Beat: When you were a child, you threw rocks at a post, but then you grew some, packed a gun and threw rocks to fiends; when five-oh came, you'd get ghost from the scene. Well, you can't go back to kindergarten, but that doesn't mean you can't be startin' over. Get your head in a schoolbook and your butt in class. And when a fiend walks up to you, just say, "Don't even ask!" You can't go back in time, but you can make up your mind to put your heart on rewind — and go from good to better to fine!

Remember?

remember when you turned me on to weed
now you back-stabbed me and i start to bleed
remember how we got so high that we couldn't read
now my eyes are filled with fire, there's so much heat
remember when you ditched me you sorry sight
how 'bout when you called scared my sister in the middle of the night
and how 'bout when your friend asked my mom how big her tits were
how 'bout you call again and mock me a bit more
than i might snap — clap, clap, clap — nah but don't push me
you can never compare to the man i'm gonna be
you'll watch me on t v with the people i'm gonna see
watch my back 'cause that's all you'll see when we next meet

-Snowman, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's strange how a youngster will think the one he gets high with must be his friend, when really if he was a friend he wouldn't have invited you to begin. But if you were confused at first, you give plenty of examples here as to why this guy isn't your friend, neither your best or your worst. There's no reason to listen to anything he says, especially if it might trigger anger. Nah, it's way better just to treat him like a stranger, someone you don't know and don't want to know. And if he talks, just turn and walk — so all he can watch is your back, just as you say. Yeah, that's the better way.

In My Heart

I been thinking about my grandma. She passed away about last year on September. I was close to her. She would buy me a lot of things.

When she died it stabbed my heart. I felt like hurting people but I thought about it. She was talking to me in heaven. I know it sounds crazy. She told me, "I love Felipito!" That's what she always calls me, and she said, "Don't worry, Felipito. I'll take care of you in Heaven."

And I said, "OK, Mami." That's what I called her. And she said take care of all my little cousins, and I said OK, and my grandma said don't hurt nobody, and I said OK again. I was shocked because she was talking to me, and the only thing I could say was OK because I was shocked.

-Felipe B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We can tell how much you loved your Mami from this piece, and also how much she loved you. We don't think it's crazy that she was talking to you from heaven. What other advice would she give you about what you're going to do when you get out of here?

Young And Dumb

You were part of my life.
I was young and dumb.
I told I loved you and that I would do anything for you.
But I was young and dumb.
I still remember when I was not yet fifteen you raped me,
but I forgave you.
But I was young and dumb.
Years passed and I let you in my life. now look at me, I'm
jail and you're not.
But I was young dumb.
I knew you were older, older to be my daddy and I'm in
here. But it's okay because You're old and dumb.
Now I'm 18 and we will see who's dumb.
In here for you, damn that's dumb!
But I told on you and now you're about to be gone.

-Jennifer GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We don't know why this man is about to be gone, Jennifer, but if he raped you then you should talk about it with the authorities. The first reason is to prevent him from raping some other girl. The second reason is to help you begin to deal with this trauma that he caused you. Being "dumb" is part of being young, and it was for all of us. But he has no excuse, and we hope you don't let him off the hook.

What I Want

What I want to do with my life is I want to be a cosmetologist or I want to be a CNA., but since I'm into a gang in L.A where I'm from, it's going to be hard for me to do stuff.

Before I moved out here to Arizona I had a life. I was going to this school called Bethune Middle School. When I came out here I banged my hood, but since I been in Durango I feel that I need to make better.

I'm not saying I want out of my gang because that's my life that's what I grew up to know. I'm just saying I need to better my life while I'm out here in Arizona.

My big homie which is my cousin wouldn't want me to do other stuff would interfere with my gang relations because my gang is my family. Basically that's all I have and my mom, and I also have to do what's right for me and that's finish school and get a college degree.

-Shalenn, Durango Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: That's good you have goals. Don't lose sight of your dreams and goals. Pursue your goals one day at a time, one step at a time. It will take great courage on your part to overcome the obstacles that involvement in a gang may throw at you. It appears that you're at a fork in the road with what we believe are two incompatible lifestyles. Eventually you may come to the same conclusion. We hope you will choose the life of opportunities and freedom.

My Mother and Me

Me and my mother have never really agreed on what I
should do and what I shouldn't do.
Before I didn't really listen to my mother when she told
me That who I hang out with and what they do can get
me hurt Or get me in trouble.
By not listening I find myself in a place where I
shouldn't have been in.
I should have learned by example,
When my older brother and other friend told me about,
And don't end up where I am at now.
My mother told me a few days before I came to Durango,
that if I am with a friend that is doing something wrong,
The cops will get us both and we'll both get in trouble.
If I would've listened to my mother
I wouldn't be in the position that I'm in now.
I wouldn't have to worry
if she is worrying about me.
I know when I was out at night,
that she still worried about me,
If I was safe... if I was hurt
or shot or something.
But I should have thought of her
before I stayed out late at night,
but too late now.

-Chris, Durango Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Maybe it is too late for this time, but what about your future decisions? Do you see yourself making different decisions once you are released from detention? What other lessons have you ignored? Mistakes are opportunities to learn. Can you learn from them now and allow the advice you received help you make better decisions? A wise person learns from his/her mistakes and takes a different path and a fool remains stubbornly on a path to destruction. We wonder what will be important to you in five to ten years...will you find yourself full of thanks and gratitude or regret? It's up to you, Chris.

My Messed Up Day

What's up wit' it, Beat! This your homeboy, Lil' Boxer, back again. First, I would like to say what's up to all the homies and staff in the max unit. I just got out of there, but now I'm back chillin' in this other unit, waitin' to go to Camp Sweeney.

Well, I am hella mad that I'm back. I really don't feel like it is my fault that I'm back, 'cause look — this is what happened: I got out on EM (electric monitor). I did a pretty good program. I went to school every day, didn't do no drugs. Even though I drank a lil' bit (or a lot, whatever), I didn't get caught though.

Well, I went to court this morning with my grade report, which was A's and B's, and with my "aggressive offender program" certificate. I was thinking I would get put on probation and let off EM, but instead they started talking about the little bit of color on my shoes! And how I need help with my drug problem and my gang problem! So they send me to Camp.

I mean, I was really doing good on the outs, too. My teacher in school said I could graduate in a couple of months — but now I can't! I'm much more likely to get in more trouble here than where I was. And the worst thing is my B-day is next Friday! Man, the system is messed up!

Well, I'm out, Beat. To all, keep your heads up.

-Lil' Boxer, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Sorry we didn't recognize you immediately and put it all together, but we see so many faces (we care about) come and go, we get confused about who's who and what's what. Yeah, we had high hopes for you when you were in max for a minute, and it seemed like the other homeboys both had respect for you and also expected you to do better, if you know what we mean, than they did on the outs. It looks like you did do better than most, with good grades, school attendance, and an overall good program (your surreptitious drinking aside). Man, why you wanna wear any bit of a banger's color to court? 'Cause even if you didn't mean anything by it, the next man does. So you shouldn't be surprised that the judge feels disrespected, like you're planning to go out bragging about what you wore to court (even if you were planning no such thing). It's just the kind of opening the DA wants to see, 'cause it looks like all your good work is just one more example of "pimping" the system and playing the judge for a mark. We're not saying that any of this is true of you, but it's naïve to think appearances don't matter as much as real content — you need both when you walk into court: appearances and reality, on your side. And we're not saying we don't feel bad for you, 'cause it sounds like you did pretty coo' out there. But now, don't mess up in here or at Camp just to prove the judge made a bad decision. We're truly sorry you're not going to walk across the stage to get that high school diploma, but you can get both your diploma and your GED at Camp and be the valedictorian speaker at the end of the year. Just make up your mind to make the Camp program work for you and not against you. You can be taking college classes online, or maybe even getting passes to attend classes at Laney, and finish this program looking good. We'd be proud to see you getting passes from Camp to come work at our offices after you've gotten your diploma/degree work done. Naturally you're disappointed and mad, but you can still make your life turn out better, or more bad.

Heart Stabbed

What is something that is stabbing you in the heart? Well, it's when you been knowing somebody for a long time, and you have been telling the person who you trust a whole lot of information, and they just went behind your back and told another person all your personal business that you had told him and only him to know! So I think that's stabbing you in the heart.

-Yahbeaird, 150 Crew

From The Beat: That's a pretty good example of what would make most anyone feel betrayed, like they've been stabbed in the heart of friendship.

This Morning

Woke up this mornin', thanked God I was alive. Went to da kitchen all bootsie, lookin' like caught the usual suspects, you know? Bowl, spoon, milk… Oh no, it ain't none, no milk… Run it with some water… What? Don't act like you ain't did it! Raisin Bran…

Ey, yo, I eat the crunchy raisin and it's tinglin'… spit it out and it's a roach! Hah! Shrug it off. It's a new day. Hard times but it's okay. I'ma make it.

-Crackhead, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: What we like about this piece is that your details make us feel like we are there in the kitchen with you, just glad that you got the roach in your cereal and not us!

Defeated

i feel cheated
because the system doesn't provide us with the help needed
correctional officers act conceited
acting like our wrongs can't be deleted
try to bring you down and make you
do something out of anger when you're heated
and the joke would be on you if they succeeded
no matter how many cases are pleaded
the system look at you wit' uncaring eyes that are sheeted
treat us like animals wrongfully breeded
only a few treat us how we're supposed to be treated
they make us feel defeated

-Wayne, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You tell it like it is, when those in charge treat kids like animals in a cage who can either behave or get put away for the day — but either way, there's nothing helpful coming their way. Where's rehabilitation in that situation? Non-existent, and kids just get more twisted up in a rage in or out the cage.

Things I Hate

I hate fake people that run they mouth like hot water.
I hate a snitch.
I hate that they charged me as an adult for four of my charges.
I hate some of these people that's in Juvenile Hall complaining about being in here when they about to go home.
I hate the fact that I'm in here worrying about my loved ones on the outs.
One thing I would love is to get blessed get another chance in my situation that I'm in.
I hate people act like a somebody in jail but they are a nobody.
Another thing I hate is these bully gangs trying to make a name for their self.
I hate that this judge might not let me out no time soon.
I hate that a couple of my loved ones got taken at a young age this 2006.
I hate that I got to win my cases.
I hate when I'm in here. I miss my brother Emmitt, and I be thinkin' about the good times we had. I know that a lot of these people might not understand what I mean.
I love… to get out.
RIP Emmit and LIl Bob

-Lil' Marcus, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Phew, that's a long list. We're going to come back at you: We hate the fact that you are locked up. We hate that so many young people are dying. We hate that the same young people dying are also the ones doing the killing. We hate that people believe they are nobody's when they all have it in them to be a somebody. We hate the way fear makes people join bully gangs. We hate that you lost your brother. We love that you wrote all these feelings down instead of starting a fight or punching the walls. We love that you continue to honor your brother's memories. And finally, we love that you ended this poem on a note of love and hope. Here's the thing: Life is a struggle, between love and hate, building and destruction, courage and fear, hope and despair. It's up to you which side of that struggle will win in your heart.

All You Youngsters

What's up with it Beat, this your boy Lil' ManMan coming up out of thgis max unit. But anyways I'm just trying to keep my head up and ride this shhh out if you now what i mean.

But I'm just up and here stressing out because i had just went to court on 9-21-06, man they trying to wash a ninja and shhh.

They trying to give a ninja 20 to 25 years! But I'm not going out like that. But I just want to tell all my youngstas to learn from my mistake.

You don't want to spend half of your life away from your family, because they going to be all stressed out over you and they really need you out there with them and stuff, so all you youngsters step up you game up and finish school and get a job and go to college so you can do something with your life.

So think before you act if you know what I mean .

-Lil' ManMan, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You know what's a trip? The courts are talking about how you are a menace to society, and we're sure you've caused some trouble, but here you are, with your own future on the line, taking out the time to pass your knowledge on to other people in the halls and on the streets, taking time to care about what other people are going through. And every time we see you, you're telling jokes and smiling and keeping your spirits up. You care about other people, and you have heart. No matter what the judge says or does, no one can ever take that away from you.

More Comfortable With Loved Ones

Why do we treat strangers better than those we love? I think we do that because of tough love and 'cause we are more comfortable with a loved one. If it was your little brother he's your family, so if you get into it you know it's gone be cool again. But a stranger you might be a little more hesitant, not 'cause you're scared but just 'cause you don't know them like that.

-J-Biggs B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You didn't write much, but what you did write seems exactly right to us. Have you ever felt bad because you treated your brother worse than a stranger?

RIP Cell

No matter how much I try
I will never be able to cover up what's inside.
Now that you're gone,
I feel like part of me has died.
No longer gonna be able to kick back and smoke and drink with you .
All I have are memories.
Your life was snatched from you, f
or no kind of reason.
Doin' it big,
lovin' life was all you did,
now you're six feet under .
Forget getting justice,
'Cause I just can't understand why my ninja is dead.
No longer can we cat off on the bras,
post on the spot, damn bra,
why did it have to end this way.
I miss you so much and won't nobody ever understand .
One day bra, me and you will meet again
You was always my ninja from as long as I can remember.
You was always a little smarter,
always was up to get into something.
I miss you.
We all miss you bra,
we will never forget you bra.
Peace, Marcellus.

-Lil' Naud, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We had to take out the turf references in this poem, but we wish we could make you cross them out – not of your writing, out of your life. So long as you stay tied to your memories of "getting into it" and of "posting on the spot" you will still be a prisoner of that past. Marcellus didn't deserve what he got, and neither do you… but he smoke, and drank and ran the streets – and that's a dangerous way to live. If you REALLY want to honor him, then take yourself away from that danger. Go to college, stay home at night, get a legit job, and then when you graduate from college, and you're wearing that cap and gown, holding that diploma, raise your eyes to the skies and wink and say "Marcellus, we made it." Because if you make it, a little bit of him does too. Get to work, we're pulling for you to succeed!

First Thoughts

drugs — mess up your life
oakland — murder
guns — AK47
keys — BMW
home — Milpitas
vacation — Bahamas
school — USC
football — Cincinnati Bengals
pencil — #2 pencil
freedom — out of jail living good
younger generation — smart and intelligent
judge — cool
paper — money
the neighborhood — good
jail — they treat you like animals
rap — 2Pac
food — gumbo
favorite songs — Jah Legend
family — girlfriend and her mom
mom — miss her
lil' sam — a nice, intelligent, young man with a good personality

-Lil' Sam, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Thank you, Sam, for a random tour of your inner landscape, all summed up in your last line.

Moment

lost
more than in one way
everything gone
it feels like
i'll never be the same
my dreams
my gift to give this world
— gone
just like that
all in a skipped heartbeat
stolen
pilfered
all comes to mind
— oh wait
it was under me
the whole time

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We know exactly what you're talking about. But here's the thing about your laughing when you discovered your error — Camp staff had responded as if it was stolen. Policy was about to be, no more notebooks for anyone! So, remember you're not in a normal context at Camp. What you needed to do, to protect The Beat program too, was go straight to authority and humbly apologize, knowing the response to your apology might be negative and ready to accept that consequence of your panic (which we understand, but your mind was playing tricks on you). Lastly, your poems are printed in The Beat, and stored in our computers, too; so all was not lost with the original hard copy.

What I Want

i don't want to force her hand
i'd rather have it intertwined with mine
out of what she wants
love is what i want
but only if she's willing to give
i want so badly
to fix whatever makes you hurt
but maybe i'm too weak to be a cure
maybe i'm too weak
because i'm not sure
the words you say still hurt a little
in love and heartbroken, so maybe i'm lost
because i'm stuck once again in the middle
i try not to think about it
but it's something i can't shake

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It is love that lives for the moment, and refuses all future certainty, and yet we may prefer to be less than perfect. Admitting we're weak, something more provisional than love's unconditional selflessness, we seek in our human helplessness. And that's fine. For to err is human, to forgive, divine.

Stabbing Me In The Heart

What is stabbing me in the heart is: My mom is gone. And I don't want to believe it, because she was the number one person in my life.

Her dying hurt me more than words can say, because I miss her and love her and I think about her everyday. I wish she was here with me now! If she was still living, I probably wouldn't be in this situation right now. So that is what keeps stabbing me in my heart, and it's hurting me everyday.

She inspired me about living a good life, and she gave me strength. I know she's still in my heart though, so for her I will turn my life around and do everything right, just the way she taught me to do. And I know she is in a better place than this suffering world and is having a good life in heaven. RIP Mom — peace out! Bet this is yo' boy, Lil' Sam! God bless everybody.

-Lil' Sam, 150 Crew

From The Beat: When your mother dies, no matter what age you are, it's like you're an orphan in this world. But when you're still young and depending on her love and guidance, nothing is more terrible than the silence that replaces her words of love and encouragement. But as you say, she still lives in your heart, and if you go there, you can still feel her love speaking to you.

Speechless, Pray For Me: Part Two

a ghost to the world
or at least that's what i wish
cold and numb with pain
aching, slicing down the middle of me
i feel like a living rupture
condemned to be flawed forever
the texture of this emotion
is like the tongue of your heart
against a jagged razor blade
that goes on and on, for eternity
and for every inch, gallons of blood pour out
when i think of you
i feel the hundreds of knives
you throw at me all over again
and i think about you
at least a million times a day
your voice as beautiful as it sounds
is like a thousand finger nails
scratching a thousand chalk boards
down the hallway in the back of my mind
you cause a misgiving terror
to the word of love
as i ask why
why me
why do i have to hurt like this
this poem is not a poem
it's only a tear compared
to the lake of lost love that i cried
i am the broken-hearted boy
who was betrayed and bound
to the bottom of it, under lock and key
she chained me down
to the dark gallows
when the lake was shin high and shallow
and she wanted me to drown
in my own tears and blood
will someone save me
or have i become a ghost

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: No, no, no — romantic angst must relinquish fantasies of deathlike void, which is to say, in this day and age, the poet must relinquish the vocabulary of non-existence (let alone suicide). What is the Rilke story? The one where the romantic hero dies, frozen face down in the snow, so that when his corpse is lifted, his face is gone. And the object of his obsession (we won't call it love), dismisses even this with a tossed off phrase of detached derision. Or was it Goethe? Young Werther? Hmm. Take your despair to the library and join the army of poets who survived the sturm und drang (storm and stress) to write poems that take life in the imagination for a thousand years. (As far as, "this poem is not a poem" — do you know the painting of a pipe, by Magritte, called "this pipe is not a pipe".) Man, you've got to get yourself out the grind and to a college where you can focus your most poetical mind!

Woke Up Feeling Worse

i woke up this morning and i was confined
with the walls of my room and unable
to walk out and go get some starbucks
and smoke a cigarette to get my day started
and that made everything twice as bad
worse than before i went to sleep

-Spencer, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** We tend to think the hardest time is trying to sleep in that confined space, alone in the middle of the night, but you've brought home the meaning of waking up confined, powerless and*

Heartache of Making Bad Choices

something that really stabbed me in the heart
was when i took the ability to love and care for myself
away from my wife and my daughter and my family
because of my bad decision-making
and my bad choice of friends

-Spencer, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** You tell it like it is, and it hurts to read the words. But it could be worse — if you didn't recognize your choices as bad, you'd go right back to doing what has made you and your loved ones sad.*

who can I trust? Nobody! If I can't trust my own mom, then that tells me a whole lot.

Can't Trust My Own Momma

Nowadays I don't know whom to trust. Even my own momma is against me! In my eyes, she's a demon, out to get me and to destroy my destiny. Yeah, I love her, but I don't like the type of mother she is.

I could never talk to her about anything, 'cause she might use it against me, or she might take something the wrong way, then get angry and tell the whole world. I remember, she secretly had my PO pick me up from school to bring me to jail, just for spending a night with a girl at my best friend's house. I never thought she'd do something like that! I was surprised.

I can't leave her with my money without her spending half of it. Now, I wouldn't mind her buying herself anything if she didn't have any money — but she already having money, knowing that I don't have a job like she does or get money everyday — and she still decide to spend my little money that I be trying to save.

So who can I trust? Nobody! If I can't trust my own mom, then that tells me a whole lot. To me everybody is my enemy! I can't keep my eyes closed around them, and I can't keep nothing valuable in front of their eyes. I gotta be on the aware for anything and anybody.

-DeTay, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** As a child, your momma is your world, or at least the most powerful part of the world to touch your life. But now that you're almost an adult, you can outgrow your mother and that little world you grew up in. We're not saying you can trust just anybody and everybody, but we are saying that not everybody is your enemy (and not everybody is untrustworthy either). Still, the pain of what you describe here will color your experience of the world for the rest of your life — but, on the other hand, it need not limit that experience. Even your moral outrage in this piece, argues that you don't feel the same way your mother feels. You have a strong sense of right and wrong. Use that as a basis to break free of the that narrow world your mother got caught up in, to the point where she'd steal from her own son, knowing she has more than him. She's what you don't want to be. You feel? Don't let bitterness poison your whole life, on the real!*

Success Ain't For Everybody, Part One

Since my grandpa died, I haven't had anything good to be proud of. It seems like whenever something good is about to happen for me, the devil is always there to stop it.

I'm starting to feel like not trying anymore, because when I try to accomplish something or simply to work hard on something, I never seem to complete it or "make it" — I always fail! I mean, this happens to me all the time, whether it's with schools, streets, sports, music — or jail! There is always somebody or something that gets in my way and knocks me down.

Most think that they know me, know that I have a problem — which I don't! It's just that luck isn't for me. I am a straggler with only twenty-five per cent of the needed hundred per cent of hope! My number one dream is to be successful, but I guess being successful ain't for everybody. Because if it was, I wouldn't be behind these locked doors.

And, like I said, I'm going to stop here, looking for success and all those good things. So, for now on, in my mind, whatever happens, good or bad, just happens. I don't give a what anymore! They don't see! So why should I care?

-DeTay, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** You should care because you cannot let their blindness get in the way of your insight! Somehow, maybe because they're in positions of authority (or maybe because you're looking for love and acceptance from surrogate parents), you've come to believe it's up to them. Nah, man, that's the whole process of graduating from childhood to being an adult — it's up to you! It's your life. Now one way to assert that is the way you do here: Forget them, whatever happens, good or bad, happens. And that makes a lot of sense if reality is defined by your disappointment in them. But the reality of your life has less to do with them than it does with you. Really, it's all about you! Your number one dream is success! So don't surrender that just to show you despise their opinion of you. No, no, no! Don't become as blind as them just because they don't see the truth about you. Put that truth at the center of your life! Success lies in simply doing that, whether the world sees it or not. Success lies in doing what's right, showing love for yourself by rising above the street — and if no one else sees it, believe in what you see. There is guaranteed to be a lag of time (a day, a month, six months, a year, whatever) before they see the truth you see in the present with every decision you make and every action you take. Don't give up on yourself — don't you dare!*

Loved Ones Will Understand

i think that sometimes people will treat the people we love
with less respect and care because the people you care for
are more likely not to be offended by what you say
but treat other people like that and you got problems
because if you say something that person don't like
then they are more likely to have violent intentions

-Spencer, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** So we take advantage of our loved ones, rewarding their understanding and forgiveness with abuse just because we can "get away with it." Yeah, you've got a point.*

Success Ain't For Everybody, Part Two

When I was in junior high, I always wanted to play for the school basketball team. That's way I could showcase my skills on the court in front of people — but, as usual, it never happened. I mean, I will make the team and all, but the devil always finds something to keep me away from succeeding.

I always wanted to walk across a high school stage with a diploma in my hand, but that will never happen. I had dreams of being the best, the most famous and well-known, rap star in the music business....

-DeTay, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** We just realized that you turned these pieces, "Success Ain't For Everybody" parts one and two, last week as well, and that they were printed in our last issue. Just know that they call "the devil" our enemy for a reason, and if obstacles get put in your way — overcome them. On the other hand, maybe your definition of success is misguided, 'cause if you're going to talk about the devil getting in your way, then you need to know that success is pleasing God. For the devil, the Bible says, is the Prince of this world. You feel? You made the team? Cool! Forget the crowds, success is up to you! (We also didn't reprint "Lost Childhood".)*

Woke Up, Remembered Nothing

woke up in the morning and i was in a hospital
tied down to the bed, in shackles
and my face was all messed up
i was like — what happened
and they told me i was in a car accident
that i was caught wit' a gun
i was involved in two armed robberies
the bad thing about it is that
i don't remember nothin' that happened
the next thing i know i was in the back of the police car
headed to juvenile hall and now
i'm locked up

-Lil' J, 150 Crew

From The Beat: So you told us that it was alcohol, right? That's why you remember nothing of what you did, 'cause you drank yourself into a black-out. It was you who told us this, right? So for you the lesson is clear. And did you know that the part of the brain that gives us the power of self-restraint is dulled for anyone by alcohol, but even more so for the adolescent brain? For you to go back to drinking after this, would be insane!

Hard To Listen

have you ever had anyone tell you
which way to go
if you was to take a walk in my shoes
i bet' you all know
my life is full of people
tellin' me what to do
my moms, family, the counselors
even the judge
to tell you the truth
i don't like it
knowing when i can take a shhh
it's hard for me to listen
not to mention
i'm always paying attention
i just ain't like to listen
because my mind is in
another world's dimension
that's why it's hard
for me to listen

-Young Chase, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Does "listen" in your poem mean ability to follow directions, or literally hearing what people are saying, like your mind wanders? Either way, for sure, a lot of voices are telling you what to do. Show respect to all, then keep the best and forget the rest. And don't sweat the small stuff, even if you lose an HV, the stakes are higher than a weekend spree. Nurture your conscience and listen to it.

you just got to know
i let my feeling show
i thought you should know
every time i write
i let my soul burn slow

Burn Slow

you just got to know
i let my feeling show
i thought you should know
every time i write
i let my soul burn slow
i tell people face to face unless
my feelings get hurt very easy
that's why i started to write
because i got tired of holding it in
i thought it would be better
to let me soul blow wit' the wind
to see how far it will take me
until then i'm just gonna write
and let it burn slow

-Young Chase, 150 Crew

From The Beat: A poet once said that the poet is the antennae of the race, sensitive enough to pick up those vibrations everyone else is spacing. Or, like the canary the miners take down with them into the mine — when it stops singing and starts to looking sick, the miners better get out of there quick before the poisonous gases make them drop dead quick. Well, all we're saying is — keep writing the truth as you feel it, and while your soul burns slow, you just might heal it!

Taking Advantage of Love

I am never gonna love a stranger more than I love on those that take care of me. You know your family is always gonna be there for you!

But they can only do so much — they do what they can. And you expect them to try to give you everything, and you take advantage of it. But that's what you shouldn't do!

-Lil' J, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You got it right! But now, what should you do to show your gratitude to those who raise you and care for you? Then, when you answer that, tell us: are you ready to do it?

Broke My Heart

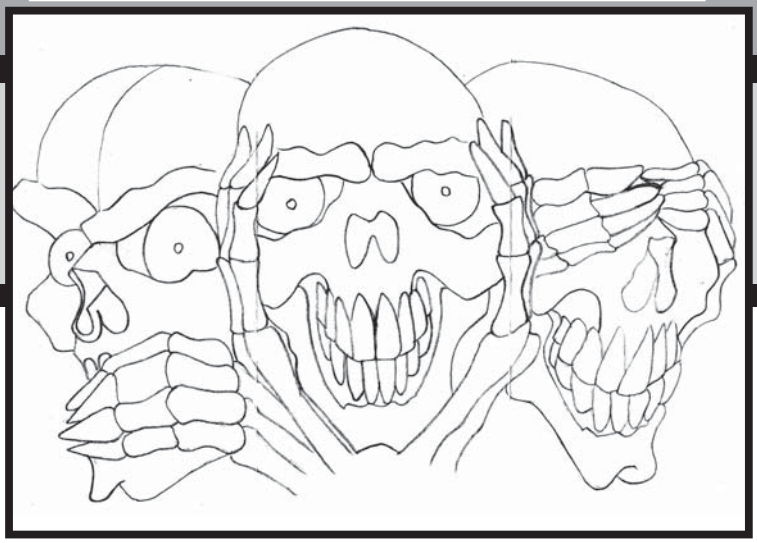
One thing I can think of that felt like a stab to my heart, is how my brother's life was ruined by a stupid ninja with a gun.

It was hard for me to take 'cause I was only a young, young teen, and I know it was hard on my mother 'cause to see one of your children be in the hospital for fifteen months! Imagine how my mother felt. It was also hard for my brother, seeing him go through seen surgeries in three days!

But, yeah, that was somethin' that broke my heart.

-Lil' J, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It breaks the heart just to read these words. Living through such a tragic event would break a heart of stone, let alone a heart filled with a brother's or a mother's love. How do we get these guns off the street?



The Grass Is Greener When You' Doin' The Right Thing

What it do, Beat? This be Young Jeff. Yea, I'm stayin' up and not down. You already know I'm bein' coo, tryna come home to my family, 'cause this shhh ain't coo', fo' real, fo' real. But like my mom say, it ain't gonna kill me. I'm still livin'.

If I pass this program, it's go' be my first program. I got ten months all together for fighting, throwing water in people' faces, and cursin' out staff, but I calmed down, 'cause it ain't worth it. In tha long run, it's gonna come back.

What made me be coo' is thinkin' about the consequences and life, 'cause life is good when you really livin' the life you want to, which is the right way. Go left instead of right. The grass is greener when you doin' the right thing. But you have to really experience life in order to live to the fullest wit' no problems, 'cause you already experienced the pain and don't want to feel it no more.

So, yah, this be that ninja, Young Jeff, and we all we got.

-Young Jeff LCRS, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Nice effort Jeff. This is what we are talking about, you stepping up offering some insight on how to do a good program. You recognizing the problem is big. So how is it going now?

Life Is Worth Living For The Joy

Well, what it do, Beat? This yo' boy, Young Jeff. Now I got out of the max unit, so basically, I'm movin' on instead of just stayin' in jail wit' dead time, but it ain't all that like ninjas say it is.

I'm writin' about what is life worth livin' for. To me, life is worth livin' for my kids, my family, whatever brings you joy, like presents, birthdays, etc., etc., but life is also worth livin' because it's beautiful to hear nature, see kids playin' and think back to when you was a kid. Well, basically, it's a whole lot of things life is worth livin' for.

-Young Jeff LCRS, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You seem to really appreciate your life. What must you do to regain your life and not live the life as an incarcerated youth? Sounds to us like your kids are number one, and if they are number one you need to show them just that. What's your plan to being and staying in the life of your kids?

life is worth livin' for my kids, my family, whatever brings you joy, like presents, birthdays, etc.

My Comfort Zone

People get on my damn nerves
So I go to somewhere no one else goes
And no one will find me!
I called it the "Far Rockaway"
It's the secret location
By the ocean
Next to a lighthouse
You'll never find!
I go there when I'm mad or irritated
To get away from everyone
I brung my girlfriend there once, though
My two siblings
I thought it was special to bring them there
That's my spot
I can sit back, relax, it's quiet
I can look at the water
Deep off into the horizon!
It's peaceful to me
To close my eyes
And listen to the ocean and the wind
Reach myself
By myself
Look at my life
Think about this love
That feels so good to me!
I can't think of a better place
To resort to
Than my comfort zone

-Biggie Littles LCRS, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Nice thought provoking poem. We, your Beat readers, get to enjoy vicariously your secret spot on the beach by the ocean, through your poem. You seem to also have a reserve of privacy within you that nobody can touch. Can you draw on that pocket of privacy and good sense when you're on the outs again and confronted with anything that tempts you to mess up again? We hope so.

Love Is My Life

Life is worth living to experience everything
So you don't miss anything in the afterlife
My lovely girlfriend keeps me motivated to be strong
There's never been a day where I gave up
That's not what I believe
I'm patient and I think everything takes time
Life has its limits
But limits go as far as you let them
I've wanted to end this all
One way or the other!
Even if it meant death
That's including escaping the Ranch
Or hurting myself
I love my family
But they shut me out of their lives a lot
Give up on me
You don't think about how those people
Would feel without you
I feel that they don't need you any longer
Whatever they needed you for in the first place
Is of no longer use
But my girlfriend always lets me know
How much she needs me
And she's always there for me
Her unconditional love
Makes life worth living to me
We are each other's inspiration
We keep each other motivated
We live for each other
That's why I'm still here!
Love saved my life
Chou!

-Biggie Littles LCRS, SF/YGC

From The Beat: It's really painful for teenagers to have to realize that while parents may love sincerely love you, they can become overwhelmed, frightened, confused, feel unable to cope with their kids when they're messing up as they grow up. Learning that someday soon you may be pretty much on your own, at least you'll have to take primary responsibility for yourself, can be really scary for you. You should also know that your girlfriend is fallible, too, because everybody makes mistakes. So, when you're free again, can you make your family's lives easier by not messing up any more? Let them get to know and trust you and your judgment again? You can help heal any schism among you all.

What made me be coo' is thinkin' about the consequences and life...

This Life, My Life

Esta vida que vivo con estos vagos y pandilleros, crellendo que son mis amigos, no es una vida de vivir. (This life that I live with these low-lifes and gang bangers, believing that they're my friends, is not the life to live.) Growing up in Redwood City, then going away to stay in Southern California, wasn't such a good idea. Came back a chola, jumped in the 'hood to this rough neighborhood, thinking it was the shhhh to do.

But it's different down there. You fight against your own raza for turn you don't even own. Once you get those dots, you live the crazy life till the day you die. Chale, you think you'll never get tired of going to kick it with the same people doing the same travesuras (dirt) over and over again. Give it a couple of years, then you'll want out.

Proud of the placas (trophies) they give you? Shhh! Can't remember all the ones I had 'cause they all got burned with the jura (law). Ever seen your homie get shot in front of your eyes, pensando (thinking) he gonna die? It's the worst feeling ever. You feel hate and anger and sadness. That's why I do the shhh I do that don't take me nowhere good.

Don't tell me to do something you don't think I would 'cause I'll do the opposite you say I won't do. Don't tell me to do it for my 'hood 'cause you'll look 'hood. Don't tell me to do it for my raza 'cause you'll be maza (corn meal).

I do as I say, so don't try to play with my weakness 'cause this is also the time when you see the best come outta me. It's a commitment when you start gang-banging, something like getting married. They proposed, you accepted. But will never be able to divorce. You can try to get away from it and live another life, but all the clika knows you're still a part.

When you start gang-banging, it's just a faster way to die and mess up your life. You living the crazy life, trying to get away from it all, but that's the crazy life with no ticket out. So recuerdate (remember), when you standing in the street corner flashing your barrio, you're the one inviting in los cuetasos (bullets). It's either a la torcida o la muerte (jail or death). Alratos.

-Morenita

From The Beat: We feel both sadness for the fact that you have had to learn all these things the very hard and painful way, but also joy that you have learned the lessons of the street, and are ready to make some changes in your life. You have a wonderful heart, Morenita, and a very good brain. Those are gifts that not everyone is given, so we don't want you to throw them away. At the same time, having such gifts puts a big burden on your back, and that is the burden of teaching! You know too much to keep it to yourself, and there are so many young Morenitas coming up who need to hear the wisdom you have gathered in your young life. Like we say, it's a big responsibility, but unless you take it to heart, some other youngster, still innocent and with a chance to make the right choices, will not know where the wrong choices lead. So, thank you for this, and don't stop teaching!

It's a commitment when you start gang-banging, something like getting married. They proposed, you accepted. But will never be able to divorce.

Angel Sent From Up Above

Q-vo, Beat? Well, here's a lil' story of me and my angel sent from up above. Wanted to let everyone know that you also have an angel from up above. Or had, and if you don't yet, you will soon.

You're my angel sent from up above
Didn't know where you were from
But now I do, you're from the heavens up above
Sent to me to love me and fulfill my dreams
It's hard to tell which is an angel from everybody else
But when you got an angel, you know it is so
You were there to gimme those angel hugs and angel kisses
Different from everyone else, Angelito mio (my little angel)
You were there so I can tell you my fears and mis problemas
Y te quedasts a mi lado (my problems and you can stay by my side)
Through thick and thin, bad and good, sad and happy times
Angelito mio como te extraño (My little angel, I miss you so much)
I guess it was too much
You opened up your wings and flew away
Left me feeling lonely and sad
I know you wanna fly back to me
But don't wanna go through the same shhh again
Angelito mio, I'll cry you a river if you'll come back
Don't be scared, face your fears and see the results
I'm just happy I had my angelito from the heavens up above
Estas lagrimas en mis cachets son real por felicadad
Angelito mio como te extraño
(These tears on my cheeks are real, out of happiness, I miss you so much)

-Morenita

From The Beat: Keep this loving angel in your heart, Morenita, and think of him any time you're feeling down and lonely. It sounds to us that you were both gifts to one another.

Finally Out And Free

I'm finally gonna be out and free
From this dirty lugar (place)
From this drama that goes on and on
Finally I'ma be out
With my familia and carnal
Finally I'ma be out of this system
They say will make you "all right"
Off probation, to a new destination
I'ma be all right
Out early October para siempre (forever)
Nunca los mire otra vez (never to see me again)
And for the homies doing time
Stay strong standing tall
'Cause you'll be all right too
Alratos

-Morenita

From The Beat: It is so wonderful to read that you are walking out of here a free woman! Congratulations, Morenita! Now comes the hard part. All the old temptations and pandileras will still be there to lure you into joining them, and you will have to exercise all the self-discipline you have developed here to withstand their invitations. We know you can do this, especially when you remind yourself of the consequences. But only you know (and only time will tell) whether you will do what you can do. We have faith in you, Morenita, so don't let us — or yourself — down! Good luck!

Amanita

Amanita forgive me
For all the pain I put you through
Forgive me for my foolishness
And my pendejadas
Forgive me for the lies I told
Forgive me for running from home
And becoming a pandisera
Forgive me for putting you through all this pain
And trying to take my life
Forgive me for having you see me
In hospitals and juvenile halls
Forgive me for telling you, "Te odio," and "wish you were dead"
Now that you're sick and don't got much to live
Now I see how much you loved me
And put up with me
Dispensa for my troubles
Mamasita forgive me
Jefita don't leave my side

-Morenita

From The Beat: What a beautiful and loving tribute and apology to your mother. We've probably all told our mothers that we hate them at one time or another, but the beautiful thing about mothers is they know it isn't true. They were children once, too, and they also said these things to their mothers. At the same time, acknowledging the pain you've caused her is at the heart of a sincere apology, and it is your sincerity that your mother will feel in every word of this piece. We hope you show it to her — and that you never again do anything to hurt yourself (and, therefore, to hurt her).

Losing Love

Even if you've lost a boyfriend, a carnal or carnala, a jefita or jefe, a friend or a family member, we all feel the same pain of losing a loved one. And in whatever way you may have lost them, we all feel that emptiness, that loneliness nobody should feel. But we all feel it.

We wake up in the morning forgetting we don't have them in our lives no more, forgetting you can't go to them 'cause they gone. Todos nos aguitams cuando pensamos en ellos, y nos ponemos a llorar. (We all feel pain when we think of them, and we all cry.) But we still feel the pain. We all have the pain of losing love, and emptiness and loneliness and a big hole in our hearts. Alrators.

-Morenita

From The Beat: You have expressed it so well, Morenita, that we have little to add. When we think about what you've written, it reminds us that the differences that separate us are very, very small compared to the universal qualities we all share as human beings. Thank you for this.

Painful Feeling

You said you love me
But the fact is you never did
I thought you were with me 100%
That's what you wrote on the letter you sent
I guess that was all a lie
You could have told me instead
Having me suffer and die of what I feel inside
That love I had for you was always true
But now I'm going to be successful in life
Without you on my mind
Reminiscing all the time
Now I'm pain free
Dedicated to Tiffany

-Baby E

From The Beat: We're sorry you're suffering through a love affair that went south, but it's something that all of us have had to experience at least once (and often more than that) in our lives. We can't even be sure that you were lied to, since love is one of those emotions subject to change. Maybe Tiffany was complete honest and sincere when she told she loved you, but her feelings changed. Whatever, we feel pretty sure that you will fall in love again, and that when you do, the suffering you're experiencing now will be nothing more than a distant memory.

Have A Nice Stay

This is a letter to tell you what you can do to keep busy in your room while you're here. First thing you can do is you can just sleep. Sleeping is a good way to pass by time. Second thing you can do is read a book. It's good for you because you can learn and keep yourself occupied.

I like to read. I think it's really good for you but I only read when I'm in here. But my favorite thing to do is I make a little basketball hoop in my room out of paper. You can crumple up paper to use as a ball. It's really fun.

-Looney

From The Beat: These are good suggestions for how to pass the time in lock-up. We hope you're not sleeping too much because, even though it does pass the time, it can be used as a way to get out of thinking about your situation and what you have to do in your life to change it. At the same time, sleep can restore your strength and make it easier to think. So just be wise in how you follow your own excellent advice.

What I Heard

Me aguito cada vez que escucho de ti, my jefita. No cambiaré aqui. Yo me aguito cada vez que llego aqui. (I get sad every time I hear from you my mother. I will not change. I also get sad every time I end up in here) This is my fourth time. Mi jefita llora (My mother cries) because of me. I keep coming back because I won't change. I could get a new life, but I like my own thing.

I have a ruca y si la quiero, la quiero un chingo pero nomas me encerraron y lo primero que escuche fue (I have a girl and yes, I love her, I love her a lot, but as soon as I got locked up, I heard) something about my lady. But I don't care what they say. The people that I think they are homeboys are trying to get at her and they say they are friends. That's not a friend, a vato who is disrespecting me by trying to get with my lady. Instead of having my back, me la quiere quitar (they want to take her away from me). Chale, no tienes verguenza. (Damn, are they ashamed of this)

My ruca quiere tener un morrillo conmigo. Yo le dije que simon, pero ahora tengo que pensar (My girl wants to have a baby with me. I said it was OK, but now I have to think) if she will be a good mom. The bad thing is that if there's no trust, there's no love. "Me entiendes mentes o te explico Federico." Un saludo a todos los homies y las jainitas. (Do you feel me or do I have to explain it differently. My greetings to all the homies and girls)

-Lil' Vato

From The Beat: It's interesting that you wonder if your girl would make a good mother but not if you would make a good father. Since you love the life that brings you here (even though it makes your mother cry), it's pretty obvious that you don't have the basic requirement to be a good father, which is not the ability to be a sperm-donor, but the ability to put your own desires to the side in favor of your child's future. We can't tell you how to live, though we believe the choices you are making threaten your life and your freedom. But we will tell you that we hope you don't become a father, at least not until you're ready to do what it takes.

Too Personal To Share

My story of my life… I'm going to be honest and just going to say that I really don't know what to write about. Maybe I just don't want to write my story because it's personal and I really don't feel like talking or writing about it.

-No Name

From The Beat: The Beat has never limited anyone from writing about any subject he or she wants to write about. So your unwillingness to share personal things about your life is understandable, but it is not a reasonable excuse not to write. There are so many topics you could choose (unlimited), that we are not persuaded by this. Write about something you can share rather than making excuses for not writing about things you won't share.

Sleeping is a good way to pass by time. Second thing you can do is read a book. It's good for you because you can learn and keep yourself occupied.

Waking Thoughts

I woke this morning waiting anxiously to see my madre on my court visit. She didn't come, but I got good news, 55 days left to get out and get off probation, and a couple of days after I get out is my 18th birthday. So even though my mom didn't come, I got good news 'cause I'm gonna be out for Thanksgiving and my birthday. Good luck to all around the Bay. Much love and respect.

-Reyna

From The Beat: We're sorry your mom didn't show up for your visit, but we're happy for you that you are soon to get out and be off probation — just in time for your 18th birthday. That's all good news. The other side of that, however, is that since you'll be 18, you're going to have to start living your life in a different way if you want to avoid some consequences that are far more serious than coming to Hillcrest. So, what changes do you plan as you become a young woman?

Fears

What do we have here
A girl running from her fears
She doesn't want to deal
She wants her heart to heal
She keeps wondering who
She'll be a victim to
Though they seem the best
She knows what's coming next
They say that they love her
And they say that it's for sure
But then it becomes a disaster
Then she runs

-Borracha

From The Beat: We can understand where your fears are coming from, La Borracha, but in the end, it's up to you whether you will be someone's victim or not. When you expect to be a victim, you set yourself up to be one. We also hope your heart heals, but even more, we hope you don't put yourself in a position to receive any more wounds to your heart. How can you protect yourself from future injuries?

Maybe I just don't want to write my story because it's personal…

My Brother

From the good times to the bad
I'm glad to have him here
'Specially when I'm sad
Thanks for being there for me
You've always been the one who cares for me
From the beginning to the end, Jesus
You've always been my best friend
Being in here, being apart just tears my heart
I love you, brother, always and forever
So I don't trip 'cause I'ma get out
And we will be together

-Chanel

From The Beat: What a loving thought for your brother. Yes, Chanel, you will get out and be reunited with him, but are you thinking past that initial reunion? Are you thinking about the next day and the days after that? Are you planning to do things that will not risk your being taken away again? Like what?

Backstabbed

One time I had a friend that had backstabbed me. I thought about what she had done and I said to myself, "If she was really my friend she wouldn't have done what she did, and she doesn't deserve me calling her friend."

Some people just don't deserve someone calling them friend because they can't be a true friend. In this cold world it's hard to find a true friend, and when we do find one, we shouldn't let them go.

-No Name

From The Beat: We're sorry this happened to you (and we're sorry you didn't put a name to this piece so we know who we're answering). What did your former friend say when you confronted her? Why did she do what she did? How do you know when you've found a "true" friend?

From My Enemy To My Love... To Good-bye

I met Phillip, and at first we were like enemies who gave each other dirty looks. Dirty looks turned into a forced smile. Smiles turned to laughs. Laughs turned into us having small conversations. We ended up being the two best friends. We were inseparable and never left each other's sight.

I started realizing I was starting to feel serious feelings for him. And they were not feelings of friendship. It didn't seem to me appropriate to tell him because I don't and didn't want to destroy our friendship. The last day we were together, I wanted so bad to tell him how I felt and feel still about him, but I wasn't strong enough to accept the truth that he doesn't feel the way I do.

When we were walking our separate ways in the airport, we both turned back and smiled at the same time as we walked away from each other. I wanted to tell him then and there, but I didn't. Now I want him to know but it's too late. I will never forget the shiny eyes I once looked at. Phillip, I love you. Then and always.

-Reyna

From The Beat: This is one of the sweetest — and saddest — pieces we've read. The relationship you and Phillip had was one of those rare ones between young people based on knowing each other, trusting each other, building on a foundation of understanding, and finally, love. We can understand your fear about telling him your true feelings, because one-way love can really hurt. But, at the same time, you'll never know whether he was feeling the same way you were feeling or not. Wouldn't you hate to learn that as you both looked at each other that last time in the airport, he was feeling just what you were feeling, and that he was too afraid to tell you in the same way you were too afraid to tell him? The one thing we think this shows is that you shouldn't wait to tell people in your life (whether family or friends) just how much they mean to you. (By the way, what were you doing at the airport? Where were each of you going?)

Mommy's Little Girl

Mommy, I love you with all my heart
I'm sorry for breaking your loving heart
You were always there for me
Even though I tried so hard to grow up and leave
You always laid with me till I fell asleep
You would always wish for me to have sweet dreams
You would stay by my side
No matter how many tears I would cry
You would play with my hair
You would take me to the fair
You and me would fight
But I knew there would always be a light
You would never give up on me
Even though I wasn't being the good girl you knew I could be
I know that you will always care
Even the times when I didn't want you there
But all I can say is I love you with all my heart
And you can always count on me to be
Mommy's little girl

-Brown Eyes

From The Beat: This is a very sweet tribute to your mother who has sacrificed so much for you as you were growing up. Can she really "always" count on you? What will be different this time when you go home? In other words, what will make this wonderful poem more than just a wonderful poem and turn it into a wonderful life? (We hope you show this to your mom; we know she would love to read it.)

Untold Feelings

I have the most wonderful boyfriend in the world. I could never love anyone as much as I love him. Like everyone in a relationship, we have our ups and downs. No one has ever made me feel the way he does. He's one of those hard to find guys.

Have you ever had one of your boyfriends put glitter on you for something special like a birthday when you never asked him to? Any other guy I know would flip. They wouldn't dare touch glitter.

He's the sweetest and most caring guy. He always has a smile on his face. If we are in an argument, he wants to talk about it and throw it over his shoulder and not let anything ruin a nice day. For me I would rather go to a swimming pool. For him, it's the beach. Once we were at Linda Mar Beach in Pacifica, and he carried me into the water. There were a bunch of jellyfish and he was keeping me away from them. It was so cute and sweet. I love him so much.

-Brittney

From The Beat: Yes, we think you've found a good one too! Of course, no one can predict the future, but we hope your future with him is a good one. The first thing you have to do, though, is figure out a way not to get yourself back in trouble, because no relationship can withstand long separations. You'll just have to decide which is more important to you, the life that has led you here, or a different kind of life that will lead you there.

Back then when I first started getting in trouble, people would try to talk to me, but like someone who puts they hands on they ears and try to not hear anything, I was stubborn enough to keep getting in trouble.

Family On My Mind

When I woke up this morning I was thinking about my family. So now I realize why should I do something wrong in the outside and I can do good in the inside? I guess I really do hang out with a wrong person. And all the person like me can change their life and turn it around.

-Dubee

From The Beat: We remember having this discussion with you, so we hope this is more than just words to make us happy. Think carefully about what you wrote: You are able to control your wish (to flash) in here because the consequences are immediate and negative. That means you are also able to control yourself on the outs where the consequences are not so immediate, but just as negative. In short, your behavior is within your power to control

You and me would fight
But I knew there would always
be a light

Pictures In My Mind

Something that is stabbing my heart and has been stabbing my heart is the picture in my mind of my dad in a coffin and the picture of my mom in a hospital. These pictures flash in my head every day. Then I think about the stress I put my mom through, and that she's sick and she don't need to be goin' through what I'm putting her through. What I'm putting her through is stress.

Back then when I first started getting in trouble, people would try to talk to me, but like someone who puts they hands on they ears and try to not hear anything, I was stubborn enough to keep getting in trouble. But when you put your hands on your ears, your arms gone get tired someday and you'll end up listening.

So now I'm willing to stop my old habits 'cause I realized that the more stress I put my mom through the sicker she gets. And that her getting sicker makes her time go faster. Now that my dad's gone, I really know how fast life can end.

-Young G

From The Beat: You can replace these sad mental pictures with happier ones if you act on what you know. You know what your mom has sacrificed through her life for you, so now it's time to reverse that pattern and start sacrificing for her. Whenever you put yourself in this situation, you cause her stress, which comes back to causing you stress. So, when you walk out of here, what are the changes you plan to make in your life to ease that stress on both of you, and to give your mother the help only you can provide? What will you sacrifice (meaning, what will you give up or stop doing) for her?

How People Feel Aqui . . . Da First Time

Cuando uno (when you) first get here, esta uno enojado aquitado (you are mad and pissed) and kind of triste (sad). You locked up in a cuatro-wall (four-wall) room.

Then in here you first think about bad, bad things that you heard out there. But once you been here for a while, it's nada (nothing). People might cry and feel hella bad and think about the crime, missing your ruca (girl) or trying to talk to her because she might be locked up too.

So me in my room, talk to the homies all the time or read, think, sing or draw or make crosses, tags or be thinking about the outs a lot.

So aqui nosotros carnales (in here us vatos) have to respect each other. We como no nos conocemos (if not familiar to each other) get to know each other and be equal. Que no? Un saludo para todos los homitos de aqui. (Why not? Shout out to all in here.)

This vato is out.

-Lil' Vato

From The Beat: Okay, you've given us a taste of what it's like to come here the first time. What about all the other times that follow, if you don't learn the first time? Does it ever change in here? Besides getting to know each other, do you spend any time thinking about what you need to do (and what you need not to do) in order to live a decent life without being under the control of others? What are your plans for when you walk out of here? What will keep you from coming back?

Tears For Me

Something that really hurts me
Is when I see my mother crying for me
Because I'm in jail and I'm not with her like she wants me to
But the thing that most hurts her
Is when people tell her the things that I have done
She gets really sad
It makes me sad because I see her tears falling down for me
And I don't want to see my mother crying for me
Now that I'm here I'm thinking about my mother
And all the things that she have done

-Elizabeth

From The Beat: People will always tell your mother about the things you have done, which means she will either be hurt or very proud. She would be proud to read this piece that shows her you are thinking about her and what you owe her, even if it took you getting locked up to do it. Now, what kind of stories do you want those people to tell your mom? What accomplishments do you want them to talk about? What are you going to do to achieve them?

I Hate This Damn Place!

I woke up this morning feeling awkward and lonely
I hate this damn place and the look on everyone's sad and pitiful face
I hate the snitches and the Halloween witches
I hate sitting in my room feeling like my life is doomed
I hate the food and the staff's unpredictable mood
I hate these damn panties
I feel like an old-ass granny
I hate the smell on our unit
It seems like no one gives a shhh
It's a smell I'll never forget
I hate being here, nobody ever cares
I hate waking up in this place
Because everyone's full of anger and hate

-Lil' Sniffles

From The Beat: One thing is for sure, Lil' Sniffles, and that is when you are full of anger and hate, it's easy to think that everyone is full of anger and hate, even when there are people around who are not. So, we have one piece of advice for you: If you hate this place so much that it keeps you filled with anger and hate, then you'd better find a way to keep yourself out of here. Because if you do the things that give the system power over your life, then all you're doing is ensuring that you will continue to be filled with anger and hate. (We do have to give you props, though, for how you turned your emotions into a powerful piece of poetry!)

Woke Up This Morning

Woke up this morning...
Thinkin' about my family
Wonderin' if they're all right from what happened to the house
How's my mom doing...
How's my grandma doing...
And how's my lil' brother doing...

My older brother said my lil' brother's OK, my grandma and grandpa went to the hospital and turned out OK. But my mom is still in the hospital having a hard time breathing. I wonder if I wasn't in here would I have been hurt in the fire? Would there have been a fire if I was there? Could I have helped my mom from getting hurt?

So many questions, but no answers

-Rich

From The Beat: You're right, Rich, there are no answers to your questions, but it shows how difficult it can be to find yourself separated from those you love and unable to help them in their hour of need. Can you write about this fire? How did it happen? How is your mom now? Does this event make you want to change anything about your relationship to your family and the community? You can see that being here prevented you from helping, but when you get out of here, how will you help them? How will you help yourself?

I wonder if I wasn't in here would I have been hurt in the fire? Would there have been a fire if I was there?

My Whole World

The thing that is stabbing me in the heart is having to be locked up. I have a three-year old son, and being away from him absolutely kills me. Every second I am away from him I feel I am dying. When I get out, best trust and believe I will not come back 'cause my life is on the outs and I can't do this shhh to him no more.

-Borracha

From The Beat: You are so right, you can't do this to him any more. We don't know what brings you to lock-up, but you know, which means you also know what will keep you out of here. Being a mother means that your own desires and wants have to take second-place behind the needs of your son. And the thing your son needs more than anything in life is his mother with him. Good luck!

Freedom

Getting locked up is not really a freedom. Freedom is when you're with your family and are happy. Doing a crime is not cool, but people think when you do something wrong it's cool.

-Kevin

From The Beat: Since you know all this, Kevin, how did you end up in here? Is this a question of knowing what is right (and wrong), but not being able to follow it? What kind of help would keep you from coming back here?

Mad At The World

Man, I'm mad at the world 'cause there are hella suckas in my unit thinking they're hard but they ain't doing shhh but talking. But other than that I'm here with suckas holdin' this shhh down like always, but Beat I'm out of here so stay strong.

-Baby-T

From The Beat: Why does everyone talk so hard in the hall? Is it because they're scared of being labeled as weak by haters?

Lebron James

My idol is King James!
Me and him play the same way, kind of.
I go inside most of the time.
I can't shoot as well as him,
but I'm getting there.
I do go inside just like him,
but I can't dunk yet.
But I'm goin' there!
If I get to the NBA,
I don't want to be on the same team as him.
I want to play against him.

-Roy

From The Beat: Got to hit the books and not just the boards, if you want to take your inside game to the next level. To be like the king, you've got to bring everything to the table that you're able.

Heartaches

When I started messing with this one girl, I was going serious with her, and she told me that she was serious with me. Then this one other girl got in the way and made me and my girl to break up.

But I'm still trying to get her back. Yeah, and I'm trying my hardest not to come back here again, because I know it hurts my parents. When I come out this time, I will start doing my best in school — and with my mom and my grandma, too.

-Maurice

From The Beat: How'd another girl break you up? Explain. As for never coming back here again, doing your best in school and with your family, too, is a great plan. What things might come your way to make that harder? Old friends? Drugs and alcohol? Can you say no when you know it leads to where you don't want to go?

An Interview

BW: Were glad to interview you. Tell the Beat what has stabbed your heart.
PA: When I came back to the hall.
BW: Why did you come back? The real story.
PA: For violating my probation, at camp.
BW: Why did you do that? Choice, or accident?
PA: Accident.
BW: You're keeping us in suspense! Tell The Beat what happened.
PA: I was violated for fighting.
BW: Why did you get in a fight?
PA: Because I don't like when people disrespect me.
BW: None of us like that. But sometimes we can turn the other cheek when our freedom is at stake. Why didn't you choose to do that?
PA: I was immature at the time. I was caring what people think about me, but now I don't. I changed. I love The Beat because they always help the kids out.

-Baby Phil

From The Beat: Thanks for the props. We always love hearing what you have to say, and we hope you write next time about how you grew from immature to mature during the last year.

Who Can I Talk To?

What's up Beat Within, this is your boy Lil' Joker. Well up in this unit I could talk to my two homies. Well I met them in here, but we became hella cool. Me and my homeboy talk about a lot of things and he knows my lady, and I know his lady so we talk about how we miss our ladies and family and how we want to get out. And we be making hella jokes and getting into arguments but after that we start making jokes again. We are planning on kicking it when we get out and start rapping. Hopefully. Well that's all, I'm out.

-Lil' Joker

From The Beat: You're lucky one good thing about your time in the hall is these new friendships. Help each other stay safe and free when you get out.

One Mo' Month

It's another day locked up in the Hall. Staff been getting on my freakin' nerves. I be tryin' to be coo' in here, but they always got something to say.

But I only got another month in here. So I guess all I can do is suck it up till then. But on my release day, I'm gon' have some words fo' staff, straight up! Other than that bull, I just been focusin' on enhancing my vocabulary and thinking about what I'm gon' do on the outs.

-Bam

From The Beat: You're doing fine, even if it gets on your nerves sometimes. Only one more month of time! Don't even waste your breath on giving staff a piece of your mind. Just walk out that gate and say, "Late!"

Girls These Days

What's up wit' it. This Lil' T at Camp Sweeney, saying what's up wit' it. I just wanna say that I don't know why fine-looking girls be boppin' in the streets, because I know some fine-looking girls that be doing that.

I went home for a home visit last week, and I seen a bad-looking girl, I mean she looking hella nice and all wit' some high heels, tank top and all. She was a bop though. You could see it already, but she was bad-looking as what. If she would've changed her life and kept it real with herself, she could've got her a ninja buying her thangs instead of just boppin' and later on catching something.

But to them fine-looking girls: Keep it real wit' yo'self! Keep your head up. I'm out.

-Lil' T

From The Beat: What you're saying to those girls, needs to be said, 'cause arrest numbers are showing an epidemic of teen prostitution. Why do the streets always have to be all about that fast money? The same goes for you and some of the things you do, 'cause slanging D and packing heat can catch a different kind of deadly disease. You feel? Why not tell these girls to get a part-time job? Why not get one yourself? We know it's not easy, but have you ever really tried?

What Is Something That Is Stabbing You In The Heart?

I can tell you what's stabbing me in the effing heart. When we see girls that we can not mess with. And something that has stabbed me is being in this boring ass place all day in your room and eating this nasty ass food and going to school when we do the same thing over and over and also the teacher is slow.

-Nune

From The Beat: Jail isn't meant to be easy. It's meant to suck, so you won't make the same mistakes and come back. What can you do to make sure you never suffer like this again?

I'm Getting Out

Your boy Lil' Dirt is going to a group home in LA some time this week or the next, but it's good. I'm gonna pimp it for a life time and do this time like the beast I am. I was locked up for Davon's day. That kind of hurt.

-Lil' Dirt

From The Beat: We wish you luck in your group home. Think about what it really means to pimp a program. Each day you get through it brings you closer to freedom, and each day you fight it postpones freedom.

Emalijah's Prayer

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

What does this prayer mean to me? Well, even though I've tried to stay sober by myself, it was impossible, no matter how hard I tried. I feel that the only possible way is with the help of God. Then, with his help, and only with his help, I will be able to accept my past, and accept the fact that I can't change it. No matter how bad it hurts, there's nothing I can do about it.

I feel that maybe I'm in denial a little bit about being an addict. So, I need to accept the fact that I'm an addict and have the strength and the courage to change this, like my future, my life style, and the way I feel about myself — and the way I treat myself! I know that God will give me the wisdom to know the difference between the things I can change and the things I can't change. And God will give me the wisdom to know the difference between right and wrong, the wisdom to know what's best for me. With God's help, I will find the wisdom to change my present and that will change my future, too. Maybe I can't tell exactly how, but I know this prayer will help me learn how.

-Jezebel

From The Beat: The Serenity Prayer has been with us for five hundred years, and it's still a mighty force for good. We congratulate you on making it your own. We don't just mean by repeating the words, but by understanding what it means to you as you so clearly do and by putting that understanding into action. That is the road to wisdom. Sometimes it's hard to say what the difference is between wisdom and knowledge, but when you say you want the strength to change how you feel about yourself and how you treat yourself — we're pretty sure that's straight wisdom! Maybe wisdom is knowledge plus love or compassion, beginning with yourself, but in the end including everyone else. Emalijah aka Jezebel, we are so proud of you, and even though we know you still feel a lot of pain, we have to say we're happy for you to have taken this important step in your understanding and in your life.

Pimp This System

What's up Beat! This is Dark, calling out the Alameda County walls. I'm in here another week — and more coming.

I'm still waiting for my placement to come interview me and get ready to pick me up from this place. To all that know me, remember to keep yo' head up, stay strong, and pimp this system. We need you out there instead of in here.

-Dark

From The Beat: Stop playing soldier all the time, 'cause the so-called war you're fighting is pimping your mind. And your gang wants to see you puttin' work in the pen' — and doesn't care if never see your family or street again. Wake up, young friend.

What Is Something That Is Stabbing You In The Heart?

Something that is stabbing me in my heart and making me feel different is, I'm in jail and, I'm about to have a baby.

Another thing is that I'm not able to play basketball and go traveling with my friends, and finish my goal. Everything seems to be going wrong because my mom is sad. Baby-mama is mad. Mother- in-law is thinking otherwise on me now. It's so many things that's making me feel like a sword went through my heart.

-Omari

From The Beat: Wow, what a tough position to be in! All those folks mad at you and it sounds like worst of all you're mad at yourself. You can't undo this mistake but you can prevent future ones, so keep your baby and your family first in mind when you get out.

I'm Young

9-Vo, Beat and Beat readers! This Lil' Moco from Hayward, just sayin' what's up to all. Stay up and stay solid. Keep yo' head up, back to the wall, shoes tied, and fists clinched. Stay ready! From Camp to the halls, to CYA, county, the pinta (pen') — much love and respect. Just try to knock out yo' time the best you can and get back home. I know that's what I'm doin'.

-Lil' Moco

From The Beat: A hand that's always clenched is disabled, paralyzed, just as a hand that's always open. You need to know how to open and close, give and take. All that hard gangster talk seems to give courage when you're in a hard place, but it also keeps sending you toward a hard place. For better days, don't just lose your time, use your time to improve your mind.

Keepin' it Real

Man, what's up? The Beat! This is ya boy, Lil' Glen, once again back in the halls, stressing! Man, I went to court and it's lookin' real ugly for ya boy right now — might get four years in the Y, or I might get six!

But I'm not trippin' 'cause I'm solid, and I already knew the consequences. But I demand respect from everybody. And to all the people going through it — man, stay solid! Get yo' mind right fast!

And as y'all already know, I'm got a hard time learning to listen. But I'm go' keep it solid in here, and that's for wherever I go. And that's real.

-Lil' Glen

From The Beat: There are at least two meanings to keeping it solid. One is not breaking down under pressure, not letting the stress make you fall apart and lose your dignity and self-control. Cool. Yeah, then keep it solid. But now as for staying lock-step with the crew of lovable fools that keep getting you and themselves locked up, locked down, and shipped all around like cattle or chattel — break free, for your sake and theirs, too. Or from bad to worse is what will happen to you. Are you ready to listen to the truth. Honestly, it's time to stop, look and listen.

What Do I Do?

I can't hide the emotions that i feel
all i know is that i'm dying inside
and the pain is real —
what do i do

-Jezebel

From The Beat: Jezebel aka Emalijah, you feel like you're dying inside 'cause the pain is so real for you, but it's really more like a mother in labor giving birth to a baby — but with you, it's the pain of giving birth to you! Learning to live in your skin with all those feelings you feel within is what we mean. Everyone who learns to live without drugs, has to go through this same thing — but you've got a whole world and a (re)new(ed) self to win. The pain is there when you begin, but the joy will come into your heart again! And again! And again! What do you do? Just keep on feeling and being you.

Hard Times

Well, I'm in hard times, trying to figure out where I am in life. I just want to get through this placement the judge gave me. I just want to change my life around.

But it's hard times when you trying to do the right thing. It's a lot of people that try to prevent you from doing your program. It's like they don't want to see you succeed. I just want to say for y'all who is in placement: Do your thing and stay out of trouble. And don't let none of these ninjas keep you down! Keep it solid.

-Twon

From The Beat: You're speaking truth, 'cause what you want to do is what you need to do — but we know it's hard times, too. And these ninjas around you, at Camp or on the street back home, make it all the harder. We could ask why — but it matters less why they do it, than you find the self-confidence and inner strength to get through it without letting them either pull you in or knock you out. Keep your head up and stay strong.

My Own Brother Did It

Something that is stabbing me in the heart, is when my older brother snitched on me when we did a crime that put me up in here. He even said something that wasn't even true in the police report that he wrote when we got caught for the crime we all committed.

So I think he snitched on me because he didn't want to do no time in jail — and it's me doing time now! So that is the one thing that stabbed me hard in my heart. But I learned from that. I learned that I can't even trust my own family in anything we do. So, all right, Beat, see y'all next time. Late!

-Tonic

From The Beat: You've learned half your lesson, but without the other half, you'll still be caught up doing time because you'll still be out there committing crimes. It's true that you can't even trust your family in that game, but then doing it all alone brings no less pain (if less intimately aimed). You've got to consider really making the change, getting your life right, pursuing legal gain.

Five Minutes Of Writing

When I found out you died
It made me want to cry
But I'm standin' up strong
When I'm holding up this phone
Just thinking about, is it true
How the bullets came through?
But when you fell you made it through hell
All I can say
That there is another day.

-Rome

From The Beat: That's a pretty good poem for five minutes! Good work on such a sad topic. Who are you writing about?

Best Friend Shot Me

something that stabs me in my heart
was when my best friend
almost my brother
shot me in my chest
that really hurt me in many ways

-Billy

From The Beat: Devastating! How did it happen? Thank God you're still here to tell the story.

Shagy Thoughts

What's up wit' it, Beat! This the homie Shagy from Oakland, just sayin' what's on my mind.

First I want to tell y'all at The Beat to not change my poems all around, 'cause that "Crazy Love" that I wrote didn't go like that at all, and what y'all changed wasn't even inappropriate. So if you want to change it around, don't even put it in; just give it back!

But I'm still at Camp, chillin', hella mad, feel like bouncin' but tryin'a stay strong. And man, I gotta be perfect, so I can get my first HV (home visit) — 'cause that's my lil' Ma's quinciñera and I can only be with her twelve hours! That's hella weak! But at least I'm'a see her. I know if I get restricted, I'm'a bounce, 'cause her quinciñera is the twenty-first and that's a lot of time to get in trouble.

And I think about the homies a lot, 'cause man we all locked up! Mike, they tryin'a give 'im life! But my fam's ain't goin' out like dat! And Dark up in the Hall, and the judge keep talkin' 'bout YA, but hopefully they can both come up here to Camp, do a good program and get home free. But I'm'a let y'all go now, all right.

-Shagy

From The Beat: You know, everyone that runs from Camp makes it less likely the judge will send the next youngster he thinks might run, so that young man (maybe even Mike or Dark) doesn't even get the chance to do this program you're lucky enough to be in. And you're going to run if you miss her quinciñera? That makes a lot of sense! Then when they catch you up again, they'll send you far away, or maybe even someplace they know you can't run from, like the Y. We've seen too many go there for no serious charge at all, just running one too many times. What you need to do is cool that hot temper, do your program, get all the HV's you can, and stop thinking like a gangster just waiting to get in trouble. We're trying to lace you with a little ever-loving common sense, but if you can't feel it, it's on you.

Woke Up Feeling Bad

when i woke up this morning i felt bad
because i woke up in this place where i don't
want to be
but i did the crime that got me in here
so i have to deal with it
and that makes me both mad and sad
another reason why i felt bad
is because i couldn't be with my family
and at home where i need to be

-Jacob

From The Beat: Take that anger and focus it on the moment you allowed yourself to consider committing the crime. That's the crucial factor, even more than getting caught. Because if you make the right choice then, you're already in the clear. So learn from this experience, and you'll turn all this pain to gain.

We Dyin' One By One

what's stabbin' me in my heart
is my bros' dyin' one by one
what's stabbin me in the heart
is my girl is probably pregnant and i'm in here.
what's stabbin' me in the heart
is knowin' some of yo' bros' in yo' squad don't
got you
what's stabbin' me in the heart
is makin' my momma believe i'm a bad man
what's really hurtin' me and putting pain in my
heart
is knowin' my souljah bro' j-b is gone
pray fo' me

-Monie

From The Beat: For sure we'll pray, not only that you live another day, but that you start to live the right way, 'cause the life you're leading is leading your loved ones to keep dying one by one, day by day. Become a soldier in an army for peace, 'cause romance of war is weak, when the ones your really love keep dying every other week. Get up out the street. Get some kind of j-o-b to support a life that healthy, happy and free.

Woke Up In Here

i woke up this morning out of my dream
i thought i was home but when i opened my eyes
i saw i was in the room with same white walls
that i been waking up in for the past days

-Billy

From The Beat: Ouch! So let it be an eye-opener in every sense, a wake-up call from the dream you've been living on the outs — 'cause the street ends here — incarceration or an early grave. So get out the street life and protect your home life. Right?

Frays

a lonely youth
not ready for another heartbreak
no clue
how to keep her from running away
so then should i warn her
about the kind of person i am
or stay silent again
like a slaughter to a lamb
do i break her
before she breaks me
or do i keep someone
on the side for safety
if i ask her
will she tell me the truth

-Jacob

From The Beat: There is no safety in love, nor if the love is true is there any danger. But the ego seeks to shield itself by hook or by crook, and makes of love but a comfortable nook in which to retreat on nervous feet — preferring a lie to its lie's defeat, it makes of love a battlefield and therefore resorts to strategy.

Doing Business

gas prices go up
coke prices come down
i was taught how to get on them bricks
and wit'out a doubt come around
and raise them fees up
for ninjas who try to re-up
ya can't hate it
it's good getting money
having brains
knowing how to hustle and bubble yeah
and never make coke transactions by yourself
'cause ninjas will try to cross you
and you gon' be by yo'self
so nobody gon' be there to call on the double

-Young Prince

From The Beat: Never make coke deals by yourself, just as you say, but also never make coke deals with a partner — 'cause he'll use you and then abuse you, roll over on you, or whatever. So, here's the truth, if you can't make coke transactions with a partner or without a partner — best not make them at all. Real!

Soft Touchies

late night, cry outs, soft spot
lingerie, smell good, bubble bath, soft touchies
in the middle of the night
trying to find that tight spot
rub and touch soft skin to skin
sweetness into the wind
hard breathing, self-relieving
until you let go of all the stress

-Lil' Jerm

From The Beat: Nothing like a massage to work out the knots, eh? Nah, but thanks for keeping it PG-13, okay?

Over the Wires

me and my squad locked up
surrounded wit' walls
on top they cut up wires
inmates lookin' out for they' squires
hopin' we free from the wires
hopin' my ninja pull up sittin'
twenty-four inch burnt-up tires
thinkin' about the snitches and lives
wanna spend time wit' mariah
but we still over the wires
why — because we opened fire

-Tonga Young Lotu

From The Beat: How do we get you to see, screeching away toward revenge guarantees you'll be a casualty as well? This place is like kindergarten compared to where you'll be if you keep living this irresponsibly. It's time to outgrow the self-defeating rules of the street, so you can take your place in society and stay free!

When a Ninja Do Good

What's good wit' it, Beat? Me? A lot! I've been doin' so good since the last time I got out. And when I went court, everything was looking good. Then my probation officer start talkin' 'bout I've been doing a bad program. Man, I haven't even seen him since June, and he over here talkin' 'bout I'm messin' up! Just when a ninja do good, he get locked up.

-Taz

From The Beat: Hold onto you will to keep doing good. It can be incredibly frustrating when you know how well you've been doing but your PO (or your parents or whoever) doesn't see it and doesn't believe it. Incredibly frustrating! But if you give up and go back, it will all go bad. Keep on keeping on, and sooner or later, the whole world will know the truth — that you're doing good! And the rewards of doing good will then start to come your way (so be careful then not to "play" it).

Still Here

Damn I've been (waiting for a) release for about a month and a half.
I'm starting to get tired of looking at the staff.
It ain't nothing they can tell me that can help me to relax.
I'm seeing the same girls go and come and I wish I had that chance.
It ain't nothing I can do that can speed up this process,
I'm waiting for a group home to come and get me so I can start on this project.
I write raps in my room so my thoughts can get clear.
I'm tryin' not to wonder why am still here.

- Boss

From The Beat: Of course you wish you were the one getting out, and what will you do when it is you? What kinds of things does your project include?

My Angel

The Lord sent me an angel from the heavens above
One that cares about me and shows me love
A lady so tender and sweet when I look at her my heart skips a beat.
One that's intelligent and loves me to death,
And youre' the one that I'll love until my very last breath
You're the sexiest body I ever met you're an angel in heaven that GOd should've kept
You're like a spring flower that bloomed just that fine
And I gotta be blessed cause girl you're mine
I just don't know how God let this be
That he sent and angel just for me.

-B-rella

From The Beat: So we had to do a tiny bit of cutting to knock you down from an R rating to a PG. The writing was terrific but a little too steamy for this publication. Now we need to know, with a girl this sweet waiting for you on the outs, what are you thinking getting yourself locked up?

Missed My Son's Birth

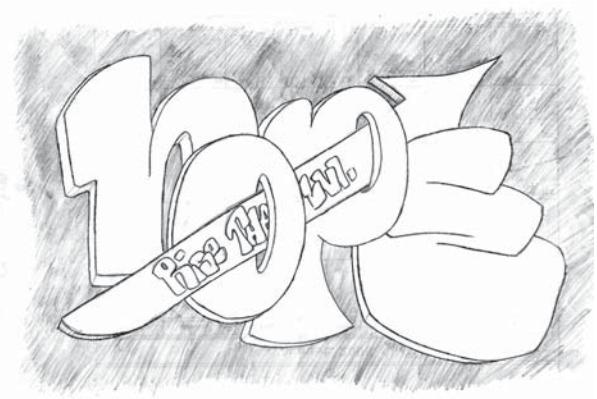
What's up, Beat? This Young Dom from Oakland.

First off, I got to say RIP to all the fallen ones. But now I'm hella mad I missed out on my son's birth! But it's cool, 'cause I'm gon' see him tomorrow.

Man, I'm at Camp with hella j-cats. They ain't 'bout what they be talking 'bout. But for all y'all that's stressing, locked up in yo' room in the hall — you gon' get out one day. So keep it solid.

-Young Dom

From The Beat: Whether you were there at his birth or not, you are his father, the one and only. And by the time you read this you will have seen him, probably more than once. Man, that boy deserves better than to have another father who's in and out of jail, or who leaked his life away in the street 'cause he was grinding on the wrong corner at the wrong time. It's time to step your game up — quit the game and go legit for a change. Maintain the father thang!



The next detainee in my room

If you get room eight you will see a big spider named W on the right side of the window at the top. It will keep you motivated and help your days go faster so look at your window and see if you have a spider Ha. Ha. Ha.

-Rush

From The Beat: A friendly spider is better than nothing at all...

No Way In Hell

i don't know
if you got the message
but between times
i can't get perfection
as i feel like i'm not cut out
i'm not cut out for this crap
so i do what i can
to keep my own head map
because i'm losing my mind
while i'm under stress
and out of all the people who failed
to take over the world
i'm going to be the best
so look out earth
i have something to give
besides a head full of nothing
and some story-told fibs
so who really cares
that i live for the moment
as long as we know the truth
from the bull

-Jacob

From The Beat: To live for the moment is all good, if you have an educated heart that can act on impulse as it should. That is the greatest gift a human heart can give, unconditional love as the ground of the life you choose to live. Set such impulse to the page, and the magnitude of your gift cannot be gauged by the economy of success and failure — for on the stormy ocean of truth, you are then the confident sailor.

The Unsaveable

i won't
stand in your way
i let you run and hide
but those times of need
in our lives
will you return
the feeling will return
you can't go on
like you are
or the end will be soon
you will try
you will try
but to no avail
i told you
you will fail
this is the last time
that i'll be telling you
and this is the last time
i'll be telling you the truth

-Jacob

From The Beat: This reads like a gypsy's curse: "Refuse my love and worse will come to worse." No, this is not love but obsession, if it demands the power of possession.

Think

Okay, what's up Beat? Well I just started writing and y'all been here for like an hour now and I ain't really wrote nothing! So now I'm bout to start writing!

I like cookies, ice cream and cake, I like rainbows, studs, and pretty girls. I like dread heads.

I got to write a full page think about bullshh. I aint got nothin' to write no more!

I'm gone write a poem or at least try.

As the rain falls I think
Think about the times we shared
Think about a time you cared
Think about the night I spent
Thinking 'bout the people you wit
Bye

-Skittles

From The Beat: You said you had nothing to say but you ended up saying quite a bit. Thanks for sharing—we just hope you use more of your time next workshop so that we can hear more.

Early Morning

What's crack-a-lackin' Beat? This yo' boy, Lil' Spooks, coming at y'all from this so-called max unit, posted up with the loved ones. Well, I'm 'bouta write on this here topic one time.

Well, I woke up this morning thinking I was finally gonna get my ride to the new mansion I'm going to live at for a couple of years — CYA. I thought that my ride was supposed to come get me this morning, but they flaked on me. I can't wait till I get to go to the CYA! Because I would be able to be around more mature people than here.

I should be leaving any day now, but only time will tell. But for me it's nothing, because I'm gonna keep it solid everywhere I go. Well, it's 'bout that time.

-Lil' Spooks

From The Beat: We're glad you have the inner strength not to let the cycle of expectation and frustration break you down. Keeping it solid is a crucial skill when you're facing time. However, you know it's not enough. You need more than a strong gang mentality if you want freedom from the system to be your reality.

Messed Up Again

What it do, Beat? I know ya from when I was in YGC, and I'll be there again in a couple of days. Man, I know I messed up, but hopefully they will release me when I get there and I'll get another chance. I truly hate being in this place. I start breaking down and hella crazy. In here I am away from everyone I know and all my loved ones.

Tell Jack Jacqua (Omega) that I said what' up! Gotta go. Holla.

-Ernesto

From The Beat: It sounds like you'll be saying hello to Jack yourself soon enough. What can we tell you that he wouldn't? That release will mean nothing if you don't check yo' self before you wreck yo' self! No more excuses, no more mess up's, period.

I Found The Light

Whats up Beat! My name is Charlis and I'm just tryin to make a quote out (in The Beat) to all the people who are locked up for any reason. I'm just tryin' to tell y'all if you get freedom, that's the light, and jail is the darkness, but I know it's hard when you had a hard life and sometimes you can't help but do wrong but try your hardest to do positive but all you have to do is keep your head up and stay strong and good things will come to you.

-Charlis

From The Beat: So why is it that it's so easy to get stuck in the darkness? We agree that having a hard life makes it hard to move toward the lighter side, but we wish more would try. What's your plan?

Last Time

Greetings Beat and Beat readers. This that homegirl Bianca from Hayward. Yup, unfortunately I'm back in this place. But anyways, I "heard" one of my boys got some time so I want to tell him to keep his head up and remain solid! I'm gonna be prayin' fo' you. Much love and respect…

So you guys are probably wonderin' why I'm back right? Long story short I'm not gonna tell my business, but um, hopefully this is my last time here…every time I come here I'm wasting time, precious time. I could be utilizing, doing something productive with my life and time, ya feel me? I've wasted nine months and some change already. And I don't plan to waste anymore time! Well, I got to go…till next time…

-Juicy

From The Beat: What kinds of things would you rather be doing with your time? We know how intelligent you are, so what would you do with all those smarts if you could choose anything? Tell us all about it.

Why I'm Here Now

This girl I been talking to for six years, she had just called the police on me for me no reason! What I mean is that the real reason why she called the police is because I had a baby by another girl. So you know how that be.

I went to go spend the night with my baby'mama at her house, then went back to my girl that I been with for six years. But my baby'mama had sucked on my neck and it left a mark. So when I got back to my girl, she seen it and started going bad, talking about she gon' kill me and my baby!

So I had some words to say back.

Then she went to go get a knife and a golf club and tried to kill me! So I tried to leave, but she had called the police, talking about it, and I decided to stay and wait for them to come. But they took me to jail! And that's why I'm in here now.

-Kim

From The Beat: You didn't commit a crime, so you must be mad at being locked up. Still, you didn't act too smart either. When you try to string along two lovers like that, it's bound to bounce back sooner or later, even if it took six years to happen. You need to decide which lady you want to be with, and if it's not your baby'mama — you still need to show up for your child. Or maybe all this happened to show you that you need to be with your child and its mother. You'd still be free if you'd just stayed there.

My Bad

Well, what's up Beat! This is a bad topic for me, 'cause I remember a time when I did my best friend bad, like stabbing him in the back. One night I spent a night over his house 'cause I got into trouble. You know how that is.

But I ended up taking his brand new J's from under his bed while he was sleeping. Then I sold them to someone else since they were not my size. The next day he was looking all over for them, 'bout to beat down like two other people just 'cause they was talking 'bout them!

But I ended up giving them back to him, 'cause it just made me look like a bad friend that steals a lot.

-Fatboy

From The Beat: Stealing can become a habit more powerful than a fiending for dope. Still, once it was done, you did the right thing in giving the shoes back to him. Did you buy them back, or what?

In My Eyes

In my eyes I see the pain of a young man begging for his last breath, his last look into a world that did him so wrong. The city that supposedly had his back that promised him money, respect, and power the game he chose to play was easy. He got a little of what he wanted but not everything it promised. It ain't all what it seems.

-Lil' E

From The Beat: That's deep. You tell a story of betrayal and disappointment. We know there's more to your story, and we want to hear it.

My So-Called Friend

When a person betrayed me, it was my so-called potna. He went out wit' my sister — behind my back! And we fought! He still wants to be my friend, but me, the person I am — I can't do it.

But I wouldn't have let him be wit' my sister even if he did ask me, 'cause I know how he is. He always be tryin'a play females, and just do it, and leave! And that ain't going down wit' him and my sister. As for my sister, I smashed on her, and I told her why.

-Derrick

From The Beat: It didn't bother you how he does females till it was your own sister. We feel you, but the truth is that you need to respect every female as if she were your mother or sister. And when you say you "smashed on her", we hope you don't mean you hit her, 'cause that's not cool either.

Dodging Them Bullets

I feel so lucky that I am able to see the outs anytime soon, because I was facing sixteen years. But I was able to beat them charges like Rocky! Dodging sixteen bullets was getting past a big obstacle.

I've been here for so long that I felt like I was gon' never get out. I mean, a lot can happen in sixteen years, and I was fully expecting to be to doing all sixteen. From CYA to the pen', I was ready for it. My mom comes to support me while I am in jail, but for a minute there, I lost hope. I just thought it was all over for me. So that's why I say I dodged sixteen bullets.

-Fatboy

From The Beat: Those sixteen bullets are still a lot like a guided missile that just went soaring past you. But now, if you don't get yourself out of the life you were living, the life that put you in the way of those sixteen bullets regardless of guilt or innocence of your charges, then just like a guided missile, all sixteen with an L will circle about and come right at you all over again. You've been blessed with another chance to change your life. Don't waste it.

He still wants to be my friend, but me, the person I am — I can't do it.

This Ain't Cool

Something that is stabbing me in the heart — is being here at Camp! This ain't cool. I wish I could go back and think of what I was going to do in a better way.

I miss my old life, 'cause ya boy miss blowin'! I used to smoke hella weed. And, man, I used to drink, pop all the time. But when I came to jail, then all that just came to a stop — stopped smokin' and poppin' and all that, man.

And in reality, people ain't ya friend — can be ya enemy. Real talk! Everybody and anybody will go bad for somebody, but not that many people think like that.

I am who I am, no matter what. Ain't nothin' gon' change me. I stand tall through it all. So, for all, stay up. We gon' make it, even if we got to take it — you know me.

-Ajami

From The Beat: Man, you're still lost in a fantasy world where you think you're here because you could have been slicker on whatever occasion you got caught up. You need to see that you were going to get caught up sooner or later regardless, and if you go back to "if they make it, I take it" (or whatever twist on that you come up with) — you will be back on lock up, somewhere with no weekend passes for home visits! If you refuse to change, the consequences of your choices will not change either. It's not about being slick. It's about getting out the game quick as you can, the closer you get to being a grown man. Understand?

Looking For A Program

Man, I got six months in a placement or family home with school on campus. But ain't no group hom emessin' with me cause of my case, not even Boys Republic. And all I got is a pistol case, but seven group homes turned me down and there are only two left.

My PO said that might do the same, but he ain't gone that far cause right now ROP is the only thang but if I refuse ROP and one of the two group homes don't take me in, then I'm goin' to the Y for seven years, so I just gotta take ROP cause I ain't tryna risk it, plus my mama said it's the best thang for me, so I ain't really trippin' as long as I ain't got do no more than six months.

-Byron

From The Beat: By now you're off to your program, and we hope that while you're there you keep writing and thinking about who you are and where you want to go... we especially hope you keep writing to The Beat, Lord Byron, because it's been a joy to type and print your work. Best of luck, our thoughts are with you.

Cheating

JT: What the hell are you doing at my house ninja?
Guy: Ninja, where is my girl?

JT: Ninja, what? I'll beat your ass.
Girl: Y'all stop!
JT: Girl, you are lucky I don't hit ladies, because I would slap to yo' right mind.
Girl: Ninja, what?
JT: Get the hell out of my house!
Guy: Why are you here, Sharde?
Girl: JT, I want to be with you, not him!
JT: Then why is he at my house?
Girl: Because he followed me.
JT: If y'all both do not leave my house now, I'm'a — It was cut off by a loud horn
T-Mac: What's up, JT!
JT: This ninja followed her here. Ninja, I'll explain to you later, just get this ninja up outta here — and her too.
T-Mac: All right y'all gotta go.
Guy: Ninja, what —
He was cut off by a loud hitting sound..... [To be continued.]

-Lil' JT

From The Beat: We don't know where this story is going or really what the point of it is. What are you trying to say through these characters? Maybe you need a little more narrative (story-telling) and a little less dialogue. We thought that's where you were heading with this, but now you've got us confused again.

Save, Pray, Hope

save
save yours for me
and i'll take away your bleed
with my heart
tell
and just tell only me
just give me all your fears
from all the bad days
so pray
that i don't go insane
by telling the truth
as i play
with the life that i lose
and you gave me space
but i'll stay until the grave
now i have too much to pay
hope
so i hope i hold you tight
'cause no one's really fair
they're all pretending

-Jacob

From The Beat: Grave not the threat of death in either yours or your beloved's breast — it is not love but vanity and fear that whispers death into a lover's ear. Do not blackmail your beloved with your bleeding heart, it is not love that cannot set free and live apart.

Cold in Here

The thing that is really gettin' at me is that ever since I been locked up in this weak ass place, I haven't been able to get in contact with any of my loved ones such as my mom or my sisters or my girl.

It's really cold bein' in here wonderin' if all the people you care about are still thinkin' about you and still even know you're still in existence. I noticed one thing since I been in here. All you can think about it is how you gon' be on the outs and hope that they are still thinking about you as much as you thinkin' about them.

-Hard Headed

From The Beat: By now you've probably gotten in touch with your family (we hope), and so you know that yes they are thinking about you, and they still love you. No matter what happens. Has being locked up helped you feel closer to them, just because you realize how much you miss them?

Brought Down

i feel like i've been stabbed in my heart
every time i spend a second in this jail
i feel like i am being brought down
beneath somebody else's objectives

-Anonymous

From The Beat: Yup. Only you can outsmart the system, by quitting your criminal mode of existence. Quit and go legit.

The Only One Doing Dirt

To be honest, the only thing is stabbing me in the heart is that fact that I'm going to do several years in YA. This shhh really is depressing, being away from my family, my lady, and peoples.

It's hard to get this stress off my chest, but writing to the Beat helps me get this shhh out my head.

This is stabbing me in the heart because I'm the only one in my family doing dirt. sometimes it gets lonely being the only criminal stuck in a no way out situation.

-Joseph

From The Beat: You're not stuck! We believe this from the bottom of our hearts. If you want to, if you keep writing (for The Beat, for yourself, it doesn't matter so long as you do it), if you keep thinking about how you got here and what you want next for yourself, you CAN get unstuck... you can think of these next years as a chance to grow and understand yourself, how to build up your mental strength so that when you get out you are ready to face the world with power and confidence.

With Or Without

i got to try to be
more nice to my parents
with or without drugs

-Angie

From The Beat: Yeah, but the drug-use cycle will do you — so give without drugs a serious try. It will be worth it, to you!

Quinciñera

Something that's stabbing me in the heart right now, is that I might be restricted from my HV, and that day (the twenty-first) is my lil' ma's quinciñera — and I really want to go!

But not only will it stab me in the heart, but my female will go crazy! It's bad enough that's my first HV, but I got twelve hours out that day — I gotta be back at eight! But man, I really hope I can though, 'cause it's stabbing me in the heart.

-Shagy

From The Beat: We know it feels like the most important thing in the world, being there that day, for both you and your "lil' Ma" — but trading a year of time locked up with no home visits (after you get caught up again) for one day, no matter how special that day, is a big mistake. Don't run! She knows you want to be there, with all your heart. Show some wisdom. Make the right decision even if it hurts.

Six-Month Program

What is stabbing me in the heart is that I have to do a six-month program at Camp — and I do not need six of them thangs taken way from my life in '06 because I lost '04 and'05, too! But it's coo'. I'm going to thug it out for Moms. The end.

-Lil' Jacob

From The Beat: Nah, it's not coo', but you got to do what you got to do. And yeah you owe Moms, too. So what keeps bringing you back? And is this your first or second Camp? Really it's your chance to get off probation, so don't waste it. Don't run, no matter what. If you get a write-up, oh well. If you lose an HV, just stay chill. It may look like freedom is just down the hill, but really your freedom will come if you just stand still.

I Was Still Here

Woke up this morning and I was still in here. It ain't cool in here. I had a dream that I was on the outs and woke up behind closed doors. I'm ready for a change.

This is my fourth time coming here, and I'm through with it. This life ain't for me. I'm on my way to camp for the second time.

Man I'm tired of doin' time in this system when I get out it's time for a change. This is my fourth time coming here and I'm through wit it this life ain't for me I'm on my way to camp for the second time.

Man I'm tired of doin' time in this system. When I get out it's time for a change, 'cause I don't wanna keep livin' the fast life and find out the hard way.

-Fe

From The Beat: At camp they have tons of programs, an architecture class, positive minds group, GRE classes, and of course The Beat. Which means that you can use that time to really get yourself out of the system, you can teach yourselves to get the skills you need to make it. Do you want that?

Murder Rate

Hey this is that ninja Ray-Ray from Oakland. I was watching the news and I saw that there is 112 murders in Oakland right now. That shh is crazy, and I just want to tell all my ninjas in the West AND the East to be safe. It's funkin' season right now. So y'all be safe and keep it pimpin'. RIP Pace, Willie. One love y'all ninjas, gone but not forgotten.

-Mainy One

From The Beat: Normally we avoid printing East and West in The Beat, but at a time when so many young people are dying, we were happy to see you send a message of peace to both sides of the city. So right back at you too – be safe. Peace.

Your Way

i won't stand in your way
just let you run and hide

-Jacob

From The Beat: True love cannot be denied, for it sets its object of devotion free (even to "run and hide").

Lil' Dave Got Killed on Saturday

Beat, what's up! Shhh, this Lil' Bee, ya heard. But I got somethin' stabbing my heart: Lil' Dave got killed on Saturday.

I been restricted to Camp. So I couldn't go home. I finally got off my restriction one day before my birthday, and my ninja got killed one day before my birthday. But I'm go' see him when I go to heaven. RIP Lil' Dave.

-Lil' Bee

From The Beat: Now you know why we won't put that little phrase in? Because calling out turfs equals calling for more killings, and too many young men have been shot in the streets already. You feel? Fatal wounds don't heal. For the killing to stop, everyone's got to stop banging a spot on the Oakland turf. Or it'll keep getting worse.

Kind Strangers

the reason why i treat strangers
better than family sometimes
is because sometimes
strangers treat me better
and that makes me mad

-Jacob

From The Beat: And that anger is often like throwing gasoline on a burning fire.

Killing Each Other

he thing that hurts me the most is
that some homeboys be killing each other
when we supposed to be there for each other
but this doesn't happen where i am from

-Pelukaz

From The Beat: If your enemy has brown skin and black hair like you, and is just trying to survive in a life with his crew, then even if he bangs the other side, he doesn't deserve to die — you're killing each other and every dead son's mother asks you, "Why?"

He Can't Look Out the Window

Woke up this morning and I was in max
A kid named Deshawn was kickin' on the door.
and then he said I don't like this unit no more
'Cause last night we got cheated on the basketball score
and all this unit do is give him a bore
'cause he can't look out the window and see the birds soar
all this because his mama was a ---

-Billitant

From The Beat: We wish this brilliant start of a poem could have gone on and on, we wanted to hear how it ends. (And we also wanted to know why so many dark thoughts about the woman who gave him life. Next installment?)

Hurts My Heart

the thing that most
hurts my heart
is that some homeboys
be killing each other
over some stupid stuff
and set-repping
on other hoods

-Daniel

From The Beat: It all looks like the young just having fun, till someone really gets heated and pulls a gun. Yeah that's stupid stuff! When will everyone wake up and together say: Enough!

When

i woke up this morning
thinking — when
am i going home
this week, next week
just the same thing everyday

-Fatboy

From The Beat: After your release, wake up thinking: What do I need to do today so I for sure won't wake up again in the hall?

Heartache

something that is
stabbing me in the
heart
is not being able to
be with my family
and being in jail

-Jacob

From The Beat: Turn the pain to gain by committing yourself to change.

First Time

the beat responses don't hurt me
or none of the above because
you never responded because
this is my first time in this place

-Jacob

From The Beat: Some come here only once, while others keep coming back. Make this visit your last!

Thinking

my name bin-den
i'm so hot i need a fan
i'm trying to flow
so i can get some dough
i'm trying to go to college
so i can stack my wallet
and that's what it is today
and trying to stay this way
amen okay

-Denzelle

From The Beat: Rap for fun, and battle the next one with your flows. But you do know that college is the real way to go if you want to watch your money grow as you grow your mind. Stay off the grind and watch you mind and money grow bit by bit — and you get to keep all of it! Amen. Okay?

RIP

this y'all boy lil' beezo
i just let y'all know
that i miss my ninjas man
i miss speaking and having fun

-Lil' Beezo

From The Beat: The eternal spirits of those that died by the gun, from heaven come in sleep to tell you: change, and still have fun.

Stop

using
drugs

-Emalijah

From The Beat: For sure! But also stop seeking love from those whose violence you endure, and then use drugs to get through it. Love yourself and treat yourself with loving care. You can do it!

Well, I guess this wasn't a total waste of time because I learned my lesson.

In Ten Years...

In ten years I think I will be doing good. I will have stopped all these childish games and come up in the world. What I mean is that I would have moved away from the nickels and dimes. And I would be getting money without having to look over my shoulders, my older brother is in real estate and that is probably what I will be doing or learning to do.

By then I will have a Bentley or a Hummer on Dubs, and I would have moved up on them scrapers and that's what I really do, but I"m gon' get at y'all later.

-Lil' Gary

From The Beat: "Getting money without having to look over my shoulders." We quoted that because, man, that does sound like a dream worth working for. Just imagine a comfortable life without the fear and the stress, earned legally by learning from your brother and developing a skill. Sounds great to us, and you know what? Maybe once you have a good honorable living, you won't even need those fancy cars... when you think about it, an expensive car is just a way of impressing other people on the block ... but if you manage to impress yourself by becoming a strong man, you might decide to spend that money on something else -- like a home for your children, a fishing trip to Alaska, a good computer for your work. Your future: As open as you want it to be.

What Up?

This is your girl, Baby Girl, comin' from them Oakland streets you feel me. I have one more week left 'till I leave. I can't wait 'till I leave this juvenile hall I been here two months going on three months and hopeful I will not have to be here for three months, just those two months because it was a waste of my time bein' in here when I can be on the outs and with my family and friends and my lil sister and my big brother Joe that just got out the CYA, and it's hard that I cannot be with my brother or lil sister on her birthday when she turn 10 years old and when my lil' brother turn twelve years old on June 20th 2006 and I know not to rob no one no more you feel me. Well, I guess this wasn't a total waste of time because I learned my lesson.

-Baby Gurl

From The Beat: We hope it's true that you've learned your lesson. It seems like you followed a path that your older brother did, and now you've got to think about your younger siblings and setting a good example for them. Good luck.

I Always Put My Family Over My Ninjas

Man, to me, I don't think I put my ninja over my family. I will always put my mom or dad or someone in my family better than my ninja.

Man, I was in the halls when my ninja got killed. That hurt me, but it was nothing I could do. I was just so mad I couldn't sleep that whole night. But I got over it. But it will never be the same as it was before. I just hope it don't happen to one of my other ninjas.

-Mike B1

From The Beat: It's always so sad to us, Mike, when we read how many strong young men are dying at the hands of other young men. We are so sorry it happened to you. You say it hurt you to be inside when this happened, so nothing you could do, but what could you do? If you are going for revenge, then you'll leave another "Mike" somewhere else grieving for his fallen ninja. And will that make you even? Your best revenge is to give up the things that lead to lock-up, or worse. Honor the memory of your homie by living a long life and never forgetting. Your family has your heart, that's for sure, Mike, and that's all good.

My Life

Before I came in here, my mom and uncle was murdered one month apart. First my mom passed and than my uncle and I got so mad that I started to do dumb things, like selling drugs. I started hangin' wit' the wrong people that was robbin' people. That's why I'm in here right now. They tryin' to try me as an adult so they said I might do a year or two because I was with them.

But this life is very hard for me because my dad's in jail. He been in there for three years now and he got one left. But when he gets out I'll be back on my toes.

-Elias B2

From The Beat: What's your plan for getting back on your toes, Elias, so that you can be of maximum help to your dad when he gets out? Whatever the circumstances of your mom's and your uncle's murders, it must be a heavy burden to carry around. We hope you're able to talk to people (Family? Counselors? Therapists? Social workers?) about this, because you should not have to bear it by yourself.

Stabbed In The Heart

Something that's stabbing me in my heart at this time is that my freedom have been taken away from me. I have a set time to eat, I have a set time to wake up, I gotta ask to take a shhh or a piss, I have to raise my hand to speak, and I have to shower with several naked men.

Next month I am finna turn 18, which would usually be your first step to manhood. I hate ta say it, but being in here makes me feel like a lil'-ass boy. The counselors make it worse fa real 'cause they talk to you like they yo' daddy or something, especially when they tell you go to yo' room. I never had no pops, so that's definitely something that is stabbing me in my heart.

-The Kid B2

From The Beat: In some ways, we think you ended where you should have started. How do you think not having a pops in your life contributed to being where you are right now, having to take orders for every detail of your day from people who treat you like a child? Now it's up to you to act like the responsible man so that when you get out of here you don't put yourself right back in the same situation. What's your plan as an 18-year-old?

Stressin'

Man, I been up here, stressin'. I went to court last week, an' they just keep tellin' me to come back, and they keep saying I'm going to a group home. This shhh is getting me mad as hell, but I can't be mad, dough, but it's cool.

I'm just going to do my time and come home and do right and stay out the way, get a job, finish school, and sign up for college — play basketball and stay out of jail.

-Patrick B1

From The Beat: Sounds like you've got a winning plan for a future you can be proud of. We can understand why losing control of your own life could make you want to get angry and cause you stress. That's why we admire your plan, because you've figured out the only way to avoid it is to take back control of your life and move it in the direction of freedom and fulfillment.

Freedom Ain't Gettin' No Closer

I am locked.
They won't let me out!
No! They let me out.
I am steady tryna find the motive
How did I get where I go?
Freedom ain't getting no closer.
No matter how far I go.
Car is stolen.
Police patrolling.
Now they done stop me
And I get locked up.

-Lando B1

From The Beat: We're not sure you intended this piece to be a poem, Lando, but it sort of morphed into one. Is your question, why are you here, or why did you put yourself in the situation to get here? Did you think you were immune from consequences? These are good questions. What comes to mind for answers?

In My Heart

Something that is stabbing me in the heart is this one kid. It started in 5th grade when Pokeman Yukio was the style. I would sell them to the same kid every day. But then one day, one of my friend went in my backpack and took them, so I found out and I was going to beat the black out of him, but then he call five other people to get me, so it was over.

-Chuwuma B2

From The Beat: Unfortunately, you didn't have enough time to finish this story, so we're not sure how it ends. Did you meet this 5th grade friend later in life? What happened? (Oh yeah, and next time can you print your name a little clearer; we couldn't quite read it, so we apologize if we got it wrong.)

Changes

You feel me, my name is D-boom aka Daddy-O. But What I'm go talk about is changes.

You feel me, change is always a good thing though. You feel me 'cause the shhh I'm in right now is not really good. But I'm not goin' get into it like that. but you know I'm tryin' to change though 'cause I'm not tryin' to go to the Y, on the real though. But to all, keep y'all heads up.

-Daddy-O B2

From The Beat: Nobody is "tryin' to go to the Y," but a lot of people end up there anyway. We think you're right about change. Make it happen. You need to make some changes, unless you want a bunch of strangers to make those changes for you. In other words, you can't keep change from happening, so the question is, do you want to be in control of that change or not?

A Real Ninja

I get more love from other ninjas I don't know than my own ninjas on the block. I don't know what it is but I think I have a clue. Others see me as a real ninja. I see why 'cause I stay true to myself at all times. I also respect myself and others and handle my business like the grown man that I am.

The way how I handle myself and handle my business. That's the type of ninjas I surround myself by. That's why the ninjas I be around show me much real love then my own ninjas from my set. One love.

-Fashion T B5

From The Beat: Sometimes the words we read are so different from the lives we see that we just can't put them together. Does being a grown man, respecting yourself and handling your business include allowing yourself to be put in this cage and to be put under the thumb of a bunch of strangers who tell you what to do every minute of the day? If so, we would hate to see what would happen if you were still a child, not respecting yourself, and not handling your business...

Feelin' Crazy Mad

Woke up this morning feelin' crazy mad. I don' wanna be in the hall no' mo', but it's hard to change when it's naturally in you.

-Anthony B1

From The Beat: We know you're right, Anthony. It is hard to change, especially when you've been seeing it and doing it one way all your life. But "hard" is still possible. When you see clearly where you are (right now) and how that could affect your future, then you can see that not changing is also hard. So you're faced with only hard choices (they call that a Hobson's Choice).

Tired

Man, I'm tired of these counselors tryna bully on us and push they weight around. Then they pick on you and use their power for bad. They lazy, don't do their job and don't care if you come out your room or not, just long as they get paid. They givin' room time for nothing. Being in here really makes you appreciate being on the outs.

-G-Baby B2

From The Beat: We hope being in here make you appreciate the outs enough to figure out a strategy for staying there! This place won't change. Will you?

Wishing This Was A Dream

I woke up this morning hopin' it was a dream, but it wasn't. It was real life. I woke up mad, but I know I have to do the time. I don't want to be here. I hate the food and everything about this place. I wish I was not here. The food was nasty and I hate being inside all day and not being able to go in my refrigerator. I want to lay in my own bed and wake up when I want. And I hate not being with my family and see them when I want to.

-Rudolfo B2

From The Beat: Well, Rudolfo, the future will tell us just how much you hate this place. If you get out and come back — like so many before you who have told us how much they hate it here — then apparently you didn't hate it enough. The only answer to how much you hate it here is not to come back.

What?

What do you see when you wake up? Is it something that you would like to see every time you wake up? Do you like to come to jail, or is it that you want to hurt your mom and yo' fam? Do you like the way your mom feels when she has to come to jail?

-Fat Rat B2

From The Beat: Have these questions been on your mind, since they apply to you as well as other Beat readers who wake up to face the same realities as you on the daily? Be sure to take what you wrote seriously. What answers have you come up with?

My Girl

The love of my life keeps me going. She'll always be there. She ain't going nowhere. Being with her helps me make some extra money. Homies will fight and die for her with no hesitation. I'll never leave her. I'll fight to keep her. Tell you who she is and where she be at. My boys out there proud to represent her. She always turn little boys into crazies.

-Jose B2

From The Beat: We're not sure if the love of your life is a gun or a drug (and please excuse us if we're wrong about this), but in either case you really have the idea of love twisted! The object of your love turns boys into crazies who die way before their time, either in a dark cell or six feet under! It generates nothing other hate and destruction.

Not Listening

Sometimes I wonder why I treat my friends better than I treat my family. Tha reason for that is because I take control of they niceness, meaning running over them by not listening.

-P-Nutty B2

From The Beat: Okay, but do has taking control of their niceness served you well? Does it make them want to help you when you need help? Are there things you wish you had listened to them about?

My Life

I'm living my life as a criminal and a thug
This city got me going crazy 'cause the game ain't showing me too much love
But not the drug game, I'm on a whole different level
I done got to the point that my life is just like a puzzle
Man it's twist and turns
That's why I drink into my stomach burn
I stay stressin' and perkin'
Every day a lesson learned
So I say forget the law and anyone associated
Even that punk-ass ninja Bush ain't even dedicated
I speak my mind
Now that I'm becoming a man
And if I ever bite my tongue again it's out of my hand
Now I believe that I could change the world like Biggie and Pac
I ain't gone bow down to society 'cause I'm gone spit and don't stop
But everybody got a downfall
An mine is missing my father
Now I'm becoming like an outlaw

-Greg B4

From The Beat: So you drink, even though you're damaging your stomach, and you thug, even though it means giving up your freedom and having to do what you're told like a child. You can say forget the law, but if you take a hard (and honest) look at where you are, you can see that the law is not going to forget you. If being under lock and key is your idea of the good life, then just keep doing what you're doing. We wonder how many more times of lock-up — and for how long — before you begin to think maybe this wasn't the right path after all.

Rules To Live By

Growing up in the neighborhood I was raised, I learned from a lot of older people. They taught me a couple of rules to live by:

#1) don't talk about it, be about it, because actions speak louder than words.

#2) run up or shut up, because you shouldn't say something then not do nothing.

#3) loyalty and respect , because these will help you survive in life no matter what.

#4)the basic rule: don't snitch.

This is a rule known worldwide, but some people don't abide by it. I grew up knowing this and I have not broken none of them. They might lead to success or it might get you up for failure. It depends on how you take it.

-Yung Bird B4

From The Beat: When you examine your life at this moment and evaluate where you are, how you got here and where you're going, do you think these rules have helped you all that much? Did anyone give you rules about going to school? About expanding your knowledge of the world by reading? About not doing things unless you're willing to accept ALL the consequences? About treating people the way you would like to be treated? About the benefits of freedom over slavery? It seems to us that these are the lessons you need to learn if you want a successful — and free — life.

Keep It Real

You know when you come to jail, you find out your girl is in the streets, but keep it real. It's hard when you find out. Keep it real.

-Lil' Boo LCRS

From The Beat: Drop her and focus on you. You're in jail, she isn't.

Stabbing Me In The Heart

One thing that is stabbing me in the heart is dat I'm missing like three of my brothers. I'm missing my two brothers, Waga and Nitro, because I had to watch my brother Waga die right in my face and it got me traumatized for life and hurt.

And secondly I moved to Atlanta, GA for about 8 to 9 months. While I was in the A-town I got a phone call that my bra Nitro got killed an' I had and will have rage in my heart. I'll never forget them two as long as I live.

Also I really miss my bra in B5 'cause ever since I left to go to tha "A" Jan 2, 2006, I ain't seen him. Keep yo' head up. I miss you. You are one of the few bras I have left. When you get out, it's gonna be bigger purp and heim. Everything you already know bra. Until then I want you to know we all we got, an' we together united as I army.

-Fred-Magred B4

From The Beat: It's tragic that your two homies paid for the choices they made with their lives. We read every death as a tragedy, whatever "side" they claim. We hope you find a way to tame that rage in your heart, because it will eat you alive and destroy you from the inside if you don't. As for your B5 "bra," we don't think you need to be dangling "purp" and "heim" in front of his face, and promising to reunite as an "army." If you choose to simply keep doing what you were doing when you handed your freedom over to these strangers, that is your business. (And it's business that more or less guarantees that we'll be seeing a lot more of you in institutions like this.) But we know the person you're addressing in B5, and he is able to make his own decisions about the life he wants to lead when he walks out of here. Our hope is that he has matured, and therefore has decided that his life is worth more than to risk it like Waga and Nitro risked theirs.

They Envy Me

What is stabbing me in the heart is that as soon as I got to YGC people been speaking up on my name. What makes me mad is that the ones who are supposed to be my bras are speaking up on me. I never thought that people close to me would hate on me. They want what I have. I guess it's the envy that they have for me.

-Queese B4

From The Beat: What exactly do they envy about you, Queese? It's not the time you're doing, so what is it? Your good looks? Our one word of advice is that if you don't like how people are speaking on you in this place, then don't come back to this place when you get out of here!

Woke Up This Morning

I woke up this morning and almost forgot where I was at. Then I heard that click click. Then I was like, "Damn! Time to brush my teeth. But damn they gettin' us up hella early!" I be tired as hell because these dumb-ass people be kickin' on they doors, then the next day they find out they got a DR. Then they go at it again!

I be mad as hell. Can't do shhh about it but just deal with it. I just try to get my time over day-by-day and keep ma head up (feel me).

But man I been in this hellhole fa six months waitin' till ma time come so I could shake tha spot. But until then everybody keep ya heads up, y'all get through, can't hold us forever. You go get out some day, but it ain't about getting' out, it's about stayin' out. Gotta shake the spot, so see ya next time ya slide through.

-Al-Bundy B5

From The Beat: You're so right, Al, it's what you do when you get out of here that will determine if they hold you again or not. We hope you're committed to not coming back here (or worse), because the choices that you make can have very different consequences. We know too many people that are being held forever by the system to say they can't hold you forever. They can. Whether they do or not is up to you.

Putting Friends First

I always treat my grandmother and mother with disrespect. And I always put my friends first. I don't know why really but I will probably learn the hard way in the future.

-Jokes B4

From The Beat: We're not sure we understand what you mean. Are you saying that you put friends above family, and that you expect negative consequences for this choice? If so, why make it?

Thinking

I think about who are really my peoples
I think about what I'm doing here
I think about where I be kicking it at and why do I only chill there.
I think about when I'm going to do something different
I think about why I do these things.

-Enano B4

From The Beat: All good things to think about. So what are your thoughts about these things?

Life Ain't All That

Life, it's not all that when you think about it. Like what if we all were in a big dream right now? We get shot or if we just died an' woke up out of the dream and be like in a new world wouldn't it be?

But if that happened, what would you do? You wouldn't know what to do. And what if we seen all the people that died, like family an' friends, what would you do? I don't know what I'd do. But I was just thinking about it, that's why I just wrote about it.

But let me get back to life. Stop doing what you're doing with your life. You only have one, so why not just live it the right way? When you in jail and when you get out, don't forget about God. Just pray when you're in or out. Ask Him to help change yo' life and He will. He helped me out. Even when I get out I got to pray day and night with hope and faith and it will help you our. Thank you God for helping me out

-Man Man B4

From The Beat: The first part of this piece asks some interesting questions. If we are all in a big dream right now, we wonder who's dreaming about us? As for the second part, we are very glad that God has helped you. Can you tell us how He has helped you change your life? Besides praying day and night with hope and faith when you get out, what other plans do you have for your day-to-day life? What will be the biggest difference between the life you were leading and the life you want to lead?

Lightweight Coo'

What's up with The Beat? It's that young Dopes, just getting up here at the Ranch like a week or two ago, but so far it's light weight—coo'. I'm 'bout to ride these seven months out and get back to the block, do what I do best, hustle, and gangbang for life.

And in loving memory of Chino--rest in peace. But about the homey, Chino, he was real as it could get and we would always ride together, post up on the block, and get money, and when it was time to put in work, we done what we had to do. But my homey got shot, 'cause we was slipping on the block late night, but I'm a handle it. I will see you eventually. Rest in peace.

-Dopes LCRS

From The Beat: You deliver a real tragic piece here. Your friend is murdered in the hood, yet you can't wait to return, to put in work for life? Mind-boggling! You and too many youngstas are brainwashed to believe the hood and gangbanging is the way to live, and before yo uknow it if you're lucky you are on your way to the penitentiary, and we say lucky because you could be RIP. Wake up before it's way late and you are alone in some SHU program on a level four yard.

To Be Or Not To Be . . .

Is living the best thing
Is really being here the right thing
I think about what
about the things I do
What about you

-Jennifer

From The Beat: This is an ancient question, Jennifer. Shakespeare put this question in Hamlet's mouth. We can't answer whether living is the best thing or not since it's the only thing we know. The only alternative is not acceptable.

My Heart

Something that stabs my heart is seeing younger kids sell drugs and smoking. Standing on the corner trying to be like what the hell and also the fact that young girls is prostituting when they should be respecting theyself.

Another thing is carrying guns like they grown and like they know what they doing. Another thing that stabs my heart is seeing all the violence that's in the streets setting examples for the youth and that a shame how some young people look up to those people that do violence.

-Poohdah Bear GU

From The Beat: Yes, it hurts us to see this cycle going on and on. But what can we or you do about it, Poohdah? Are you providing the best example you can for the next generation? Any suggestions?

Woke Up This Morning

Woke up this morning feeling hella damn tired, look in my room for a hot ass wire. These damn staffs be waking us up hella early in the morning around 6:30am a quarter to 7:00. When they wake us up I really don't feel like waking up. I feel like staying asleep a little longer. Then after we wash our face and brush yo' teeth we have to fold our beddings and wait for them to say five minutes till breakfast or till they say stand by for breakfast. But thank God that I'm a Step four.

-Rodnika Baby GU

From The Beat: What does it mean to be a Step 4? How do you earn it? What privileges do you get that others don't?

Today

Today when I woke up I felt happy, and then my life turned around again when my lawyer came and told me that the two counts that I got is worth seven years. I just cried, cried, cried... And then he told me that I had about three more coming, maybe even more. I went to my room and lost my mind even more. All I could think about that I'm go to be 22 years old, maybe even older.

Then my granny came. I cried some more. But she made my day and made me happy.

-Monay GU

From The Beat: You're wise to know that your true blessing is your granny who loves you. Giving up so many years is enough to make anyone cry. The real tragedy is that you didn't shed your tears before you did the things that led to this. You probably won't take any comfort in this, Monay, but from where we sit, 22 is still a young person ready to start her life.

My Girl

I woke up this morning thinking 'bout my girl. She's my heart. She's my soul. I love her more than the world. I pray every night so when I come home we can reunite.

I puts it down. You know how I do. I'm in to win it. Don't cry baby girl. When I come home, it's me and you against the world. I love you baby. It's just you and me. Don't let nobody tell you different that you the one fo' me!

-Berty B5

From The Beat: It must be a great comfort to know you have a girl waiting for you on the outs. But don't you think you owe her for staying true? (Would you have stayed true to her if she were locked up and you were on the outs?) And what you owe her is not risking being taken from her again... which means, not putting your own desires and instant pleasures ahead of her. How will you do that when you get out? How will you make sure the two of you can stay together?

Yeah!

Yeah it's been a month an' a half, an' I'm 'bout to get out by next Tuesday. Being up in here has been hell, but it's almost ova now. And when I leave, best believe I ain't coming back. Bye Beat. Thank you for your support and love.

-Hyphy Girl GU

From The Beat: And thank you for sharing with us your experiences and thoughts. We wish you the best of luck! Don't disappoint yourself!

My Love

When I see my sexy love
She always is looking right
My sexy love always showing her true colors
My sexy love has those sexy lips
My sexy love is always by ma side
My sexy love has the most beautiful smile
My sexy love ain't afraid to say anything
My sexy love is Jeannie
My sexy love is the most sexy girl I've been with
My sexy love got the sexiest body
That is why I love Jeannie

-Young Harlem LCRS

From The Beat: So you love this lady's spirit, spunk and smile, as well as her body, Young Harlem? That's all sexy. Sweet poem.

Waitin'

I'm patiently waitin' for my time to shine
My time to fly high above the sky
And take my spot at the top wit' the best of the best
And put my skills tothe test against all the rest
Of them peeps out there inthem street out there
For all peeps who think that I'm weak out here
And I don't care or fear any of them foo's
And I simply refuse to lose to them dudes
'Cause it's crucial for me to be large like Biggy
And get the hell out these halls and these streets
So I pray to Big G
That He will help me achieve my dreams

-Mista Majik B2

From The Beat: Does God answer everyone's prayers? If not, then why should He answer yours? What are you giving back to God? Are you trying to live your life according to His laws? Are you promising things in return for achieving your dreams, or are you hoping that God will give you something for nothing?

I'm Your Favorite Rapper

It's ya boy, T Money
Yeah, man, I'm down right now
They got me locked up
At Log Cabin Ranch
But what is my lifestyle like?
It's nothin' similar to a movie
'Cause everywhere I go
I got people hatin' on me
So much jealousy and envy
I don't make enemies
Enemies make me
But, still, I don't let anything knock my hustle
'Cause Mama always told me
There'd be days like this
Daddy always told me
There's one-hundred and one ways to get rich, too,
Baby Boy
Ain't gotta stand out there
On the street corner
Hustlin' for them dimes and nickels
But everywhere I go
I gotta watch my back
'Cause there's so many hatas
That's got envy and jealousy
Runnin' through their blood line
But still I shine
'Cause I know I got potential
In my blood line
And that's just me
Young T
Coming from the city
So, dog, when you see me
Don't hate on me
Don't jock me
Don't knock me
Dog, you can be
Whatever you wanna be
Please believe
I'm not your enemy
'Cause everywhere I go
From San Francisco to San Jose
Back to home
Then I be on my way
To Vallejo
So, dog, don't hate on me
I might be
In the party
Sittin' in the VIP
Sippin' a cup of Bacardi
And if a shorty lookin'
Don't get mad at me
Just please believe
I don't go nowhere
To make enemies
I don't make enemies
Enemies make me
I can go anywhere in this world
Please believe
I don't have to have a pistol
'Cause everywhere I go
I know God got my back
It's a wrap!

-T Money LCRS

From The Beat: You hint at a lot of things in this poem, that could make a really fascinating essay or poem, but you just touch at them, then move on. Why don't you write something thorough about the advice your dad gives you about how you could earn a decent living without hustling on the block? What kind of work does your dad do? What skills do you have that you could maneuver into a profession that you'd enjoy? Part of you is very wise and another part fronts, flaunts the b-s. If that's true, how can you teach anyone envious of you what you've already learned? Spread the wisdom? Maybe God does have your back, but don't you think God has everyone's back, because God loves everyone? Better not take anyone's support, including God's, for granted.

This Morning

I woke up this morning, and brushed my teeth
As I walked by to my room, I smelled stanky feet
In my room, I read a book as I walked out
I hope my rec don't get took
Then after that we ate some lunch

-Dell B5

From The Beat: Your description doesn't make it sound like a place we would like to spend time. What about you? What did you have for lunch?

My Best Friend Stabbed Me In The Heart

I once had a best friend who I think stabbed me in my heart. The reason why I say that is because I did everything I could for her. I let her live with me and my sister. I treated her like a sister to me when I went shopping. Everything I did for myself, I did for her and she lied on me. That's why I'm here now. I don't know who to trust.

-Darlene GU

From The Beat: Trust who your heart tells you to trust. Even though sometimes the ones we trust turn out to be untrustworthy, that is part of life's learning experience. Don't let this one incident make you lose trust in others that you already trust.

What's My Girlfriend Doing?

Something that is stabbing me in the heart is being away from my family and my girl—not being able to be there for them how I want to. Another thing that's stabbing me is being locked up, not being able to support my loved ones, not having my freedom, not knowing what my girlfriend is doing, and who she's with—that's also stabbing me in the heart.

-Domo LCRS

From The Beat: You might be surprised, Domo. Many guys may not talk about it out loud, but they worry big time about what their special lady on the outs is doing while they're incarcerated. Girls wonder and stress about their boyfriends, too. Unfortunately, your imagination can create all kinds of scenarios about that lady, especially on, like, a Saturday night, when she could be anywhere with anyone and you're chilling in your dorm down at the Ranch, helpless to know what's going on with her. Does the threat of losing her because you aren't there with her, serve as a motive for you to stay out of any mess, once you're free again, so you can be with her? We hope so.

What Is Love

What is love? To me love is something that you get when you are in love with somebody.

Man, I was running from the cops one day and I seen her and she told me to come with her. I ran with her to her house and the cops stopped next to her house. She asked me my name and I said, "Young Flat Head." Then she said her name was Ro Ro. So we hit it off right then and there. So one day I was going to her house and she was...

(to be continued...)

-Flat Head B5

From The Beat: This leaves us wanting to know what happens next. So we hope you tell us how this ends.

Raccoons—The Beat Within Interviews Lil' R.

LR: What is it? My name is Lil' R. I'm from where those get hyphy. You see the raccoons? We like those raccoons because they're like us (Slow Pain and me). They come out at night, but we can't tell you more about what we do at night.
TBW: OK, so what about the raccoons that live down here at the Ranch? Aren't they cute? Many of them were born here, probably under the cafeteria.
LR: There's actually a raccoon that lives down here with us. We call him "Tacho." I always see him in the morning. He tries to play around with us, like, he moves the basketball with his head and stuff. He gets mad, though, because if I call him "Mapache," he gets mad. He don't like that name because that means "raccoon" in Spanish. He likes "Tacho."

He likes to play around with us, but the counselors tell us to stay away from him, because raccoons are PCed up, because they have rabies and stuff. He likes to run away and stuff, and come back. He's coo', he's coo'. He has a long tail.
TBW: How old is he?
LR: He's seventeen years old in raccoon age.
TBW: Do you remember when he was a baby?
LR: I wasn't here then, but the counselors told me he got burned. I guess his mom didn't take care of him. The cook poured hot oil in the garbage can outside the cafeteria, and being a raccoon that he is, he jumped in the garbage can and got burned. He was hurt all over on his arm and his leg. He's okay now. You can see where his arm was hurt if you look closely.
TBW: So you like raccoons partly because they come out at night?
LR: Uh huh (yes.)
TBW: Why?
LR: They bug people, 'cause they mess up the garbage cans. And me and Slow Pain, we come out at night.

-Lil' R LCRS

From The Beat: Don't be the fool and get too close to those raccoons, listen to the counselors. Raccoons carry plenty of diseases, plus ticks, fleas and rabies to name a few. Looks can be deceiving, leave them critters with the heavy paws alone!

Dat Thing

The thing that is stabbing me in the back is my pop's death. He passed like a year ago, and I still feel that pain. It' s like it never went away. I mean you tell me, you lose yo' pops at the age of 16, how would you feel? But all his death did was wake a ninja up and tell a ninja this shhh ain't no game and you can get took out the game by a snap of a finger. That's why I gotta get it, while I can 'cause I don't know when it's gone be my time. But until then I'ma hustle till the sun come up, stack my dip and make it to the top and shine on all hatas.

-Ham B5

From The Beat: If your current situation is an example of making it to the top and getting it while you can, then maybe it's time to rethink what you're doing. Yes, life can be taken in the snap of a finger, but is that a reason to put your life (and your freedom) under the control of others? If you make it to the top and stack your chips — just in time to go to prison or to the grave — then what good has any of it done you?

Do Time

Hey, this is the Weather Man. I have been at Log Cabin Ranch for nine months. So if you are coming to the Ranch, come in, do your time, an' go home, 'cause it is no game. Dead time is go' to make you run, so do your time.

-Weather Man LCRS

From The Beat: To your great credit, Weather Man, you've not run from the Ranch. You're also open to learning from your friends and the counselors down there, and from your program. What you've written is great advice.

You're The One For Me

'Cause you know our love will go' thrive
'Cause my love for you will never end
You're my girl and I need you with me
Let me fill the passion that you need
And I know that we are far away
But I know my love will never end
I need you the way that you need me
Just tell me what you want from me

Chorus:
That I know you're the one all for me
'Cause I know without you, I'm nothing
Let me express, let me give you what you need
I love you for all eternity

What to do without you, if you're not by my side
Holding hands and talking in the night
But now that you're far, I stay lonely in this park
I look at the sky and picture you upon a star
But now that I know you're not coming back
I cry and cry, 'cause I'm so sad
But I know that someday you will be back
'Cause our love--forever it will last

Chorus: one time
That I know you're the one all for me
'Cause I know without you I'm nothing
Let me express, let me give you what you need
I love you for all eternity

-Lil' Rapper LCRS

From The Beat: Nice love song. You have such a romantic heart and you're proud to put your emotions out there—that's why your songs are always so touching. Those who like mushy lovey-dovey lyrics can relate. We hope the lady you wrote this for reads it or hears you sing it to her, and feels the same way towards you.

Let Me Shine Part 2

It yo' boy, Young Money
Down at the Ranch
I had to switch it up
From T Money to Young Money
I got hatas on my jock
And it just won't stop
But I look at that
I'm a let that be the reason
I'm gonna keep shinin'
They criticizin' my writin'
They say I ain't good enough
For a "Piece Of The Week"
So tell me this
Why I can't shine
And spit my rhymes
So I'm goin' to keep it goin'
And I'm goin' to keep tryin'
'Cause I'm a stay shinin'
I know I shine harder
Than your diamonds
So maybe that the reason
You be hatin' on me
But I'm a let this be
To be continued

-Young Money LCRS

From The Beat: Our responses are not about humiliating you. We respond with frustration 'cause we know where this lifestyle that you long for/miss leads. You have great potential to teach. YOU have the opportunity to help the youngstas too. You have the potential to go down another safer more productive road, but as long as you write about the booze, the drugs, the hood, and being the baddest thug, we'll have to either cut your pieces or respond accordingly. Teach Young Money, teach!

Woke Up This Morning...

I woke up this morning thinking about my court date, about when I'm getting out. I think about this every morning when I'm in this joint. I was also thinking about what I'm gonna be in January 2007 — I'm gonna be a father so I have been thinking about things I gotta do to be a better father than mine was, so my kid don't end up like me and be in jail. I think if I had a better father figure I would not be here, but I'm not gonna sit here and blame my father for my mistakes. But what I'm tryna say is if my father was there for me I think my life would have been a lil' easier. So Beat, with this is what I think about every morning.

-Young Hitta B4

From The Beat: Being a father, as you know, means a lot more than just providing the seed to bring a child into the world. Since you grew up with an absent father, then you know the most important thing you can provide your child is yourself. All the words of love and the things you can buy him/her count for very little compared to just being there every day to guide, to teach, to watch over and protect. The danger is this: Young men who grow up without fathers often learn the wrong lesson and follow in their father's footsteps. (We wonder if your father was simply following a patter set down before him...) We hope you break this pattern with your son or daughter. It's the most important thing you can do in the world.

No Father

The thing that is stabbing me in my heart is that my dad wasn't there when I was lil', and didn't show me that he love me. Or tell me and show me how to be a man and just teach me something I can hold and say my father told me this and hold to my heart. But I think that what's stabbing me in my heart because most people in the world have their father and become good people and become something in life.

-Mackie-O B4

From The Beat: We're sorry you had to grow up without the benefit of a father to teach and guide you. That means that you have had to father yourself, and learn the lessons of life however you could. But now it's not enough to blame him for not being there. Now you have to take responsibility for your own actions, because only you will be facing the consequences, both good and bad.

Goin' Through Some Mess

What it do, Beat? This Young Jeff. Just writin' to see what's up wit' the people who is incarcerated in San Francisco—B1, B2, B3, B4, B5.

Me? I'm just up here chillin' like a villain and still reppin' tha turf. But, yea, right now I'm goin' through some shhh. Why you think every gurl I used to mess wit' is on my bump so much? 'Cause I be tappin' in on everythang walkin', 'cause they peep my swaga, which is my appearance, my words I use, where I'm from, and how I come at a girl, you already know.

-Young Jeff LCRS

From The Beat: Young Jeff, the time is now to do more than chill. The time is now to become productive! In truth, very few people care to read about how smooth you are with the ladies. More people want to read about how to avoid the traps you fell into. More Beat readers want to learn from you, so step up and teach! Be a leader!

Here We Go

Here we go again but the tables have been turned
And all my bridges are burned
Instead of being the one hurt
I'm the one causing the hurt
Choose up on some dreads
And a good flirt
Shhh but it hurt me too
Being that what goes around comes around ten times harder
Not by love but by consequences
Now look where I'm at everywhere he tried to keep me
Or at least where I used him to keep me from

-Jazmyn GU

From The Beat: This is somewhat mysterious, Jazmyn. If you used him to keep you from this place, then how come you're here? One thing is for sure, whether you hurt anyone else or not, you are definitely in a worse place than before. So, if you could do things over (and, of course, you will be able to), what would you do differently?

Sleepless Night

This morning I woke up tired because I was trippin' off if I was being released or not. I didn't get no sleep and my stomach was hurting. When I went to the holding chambers, they gave me the charges that were filed against me, and I was surprised because they try to get me for gang affiliation. I was mad but I didn't lose hope.

The judge gave me an extra week till my next court date, but it could have been worse. October 18 was the court date they tried to give me till my next court date, but it's all good.

-Luis B2

From The Beat: When you're losing sleep over it, then it's not all good! In your situation, all you can do is wait to see what the judge decides. What's the worst you could hear? What's the best?

The First Time I Saw You

Hey, Little Ma,

The first time I saw you, I knew that it was love at first sight. We met after school and, Baby Girl, when I look in your eyes, it's like watching the sunrise. And every night I see you in my dreams, and when we kiss, it's like we are making love. So Baby Girl, let me be the one to give you all the things you need and more. Baby, good love and protection.

-T Money LCRS

From The Beat: Sweet letter to your lady, T. How are you going to be able to give her what she needs when yo ucan barely take care of YOU!? Now is a great time to get your plans together for all of your future—a job, school, etc, so when you're free again, you'll be able to follow it.

Same Ole' Thang

I woke up this morning, brushed my teeth, washed my face, went to fold up my bedding, come out for breakfast, cleaned up the kitchen, went to school, ate lunch, went back to my room, then went back to school, came back out and ate dinner. Took a shower, came back out and now I'm writing The Beat. The end. For all locked up keep your head up.

-Ireen GU

From The Beat: It sounds like you know this routine by heart. Same thing over and over again. Aren't you tired of the same old same old day after day? What are you planning to do about it?

Diaries

I woke up this morning... feeling sober as hell. Man, I just did 90 days at CYA and they trying to send a ninja back. It's lightweight cool up there, though. But it ain't my type of environment and I'm trying to be out for New Year's Eve. I missed like three of them thangs. Anyway, I gotta get far quick fast to the room.

-De'Aries B5

From The Beat: You really aren't writing much for us, these days, De'Aries. This piece could benefit from some explanations, like why they may send you back and why it's so important to get out by New Year's Eve...

Life's Limits

What it do with y'all out there? This ya boy D-Skirts, and I am about to get out in about 24 hours, so keep y'all heads up and stay out this place 'cause it ain't for you. Understand that you have to live life under certain limits and circumstances. Love y'all like a fat kid love cake

-D-Skirts B4

From The Beat: Yes, we all have to live our lives under certain limits. We hope you take this important lesson to heart so that you're not tempted to violate those limits and have to face these same consequences again in the future.

Blood Is Thicker Than Water

I don't treat strangers better than my loved ones because blood is thicker than water. But I don't look at my friend as a stranger. But we have family member that will backstab us before a stranger, but I could tell real from fake. To all you clowns stay down.

-Lgb B2

From The Beat: How do you tell real from fake? Are you ever wrong? It sounds like you're saying that blood isn't always thicker than water, because blood can turn on you too. Who is standing by you how? That's who your true loved ones are.

Mad

I'm mad because they got me locked up again.

-Fat Thug B5

From The Beat: Who are you mad at?

Freedom To Me

To be free again just seems too good to be true. Freedom to me is like a dream I can't ever catch. It seems like I'm walking on an endless road and I'll never be free again. I hate the system.

-Chi Frank LCRS

From The Beat: Good to hear you hate the system, so what will you do to stay out of the system? You do have a date with freedom, the question is how will you use your freedom?

What's Up, Beat?

This Little R
Losing a friend is hard
Even more when you're locked up
Can't do shhh
But tell these suckers
Smile now, cry later
Forget the world
I don't give a damn no more if I die
That's the way I'm living my life
I know my time is soon
The only thing keeping me alive is this Ranch
One love

-R

From The Beat: Why does it have to be this way? Take better control of your life! Make better choices! Choices that lead you down a road where your life doesn't have to be so tragic.

Criticize

A, Beat!
Don't Beat me to my responses
Be easy like Eazy-E be
And don't criticize me
Y'all criticize everything we write or wrote
And that all he wrote
'Til that next episode
So let go

-Anonymous LCRS

From The Beat: Maybe we sometimes are too harsh in our response, because of the ridiculous pieces one creates. What we really encourage all of you to write about is something unique, serious, something that will teach your readers about what you've already learned about in your young lives, especially something that will help the young ones who read your work, so they can avoid getting into any trouble any of you have already been through. You all have a huge wealth of experience that teaches judges, teachers, POs, PDs, police, social workers, all of us when we read what you write, especially when it comes from your hearts. Leave the bull!

What If...

What if there's no world
What if I was not there?
What if the sky was blue?
What if I knew you?
What if the world was to end?
What if what if that's the question?
So many ifs

-Jennifer

From The Beat: It can be fun to play with these unknowable questions, but you are in this world which really does exist, so we hope you put as much focus on what it is you need to do to live in this world in freedom and good health.

Love Is Pain

Love is pain
Pain is love
I love my barrio
And they love me back
With all my homies
Cantado la cansión
Salvatrucho
(We sing the song of El Salvador)
That's where
I'm from
You know my name
Is Slow Pain
Always give you
That pain

-Slow Pain LCRS

From The Beat: You often write about pain, the pain that you've nicknamed yourself for, Slow Pain, but you almost never write about what is causing that hurt in your life. Does the hood, although you have love for it, bring pain? Is it in the past and/or ongoing? What could you do to avoid it? Do you think you can ever outgrow it? Or do you accept it into your life as something you have to live with? It sounds like it may be causing you permanent harm.

Open Eyes

It's ya girl Jazz'ah Belle. I really don't wanna talk about this topic. Oh, never mind. I will.

I remember me turning my back on my big sis Pooka for some dumb beezy. Man, I wish I could turn back the hands of time on that, on real talk, because blood is always thicker than water. But family can be more smirkish, too. At time, family done did me smirkish, but it's all good.

Everything happens for a reason. My eyes are open again.

-Yung Jazz'ah Belle

From The Beat: Sometimes we do things to family that we carry regrets around for many years. But the fact that "blood is always thicker than water" should give you hope that things can turn around for you and your sister, and that the two of you will again be friends after some time has passed.

Woke Up This Morning . . .

Woke up this morning like just another day wanting freedom, like a bird. The feeling I got is the feeling locked in jail, wanting to be free. I just want the hell out.

-Doloris

From The Beat: Well, on one hand we understand why you would want out of a place you can't just walk out of. But on the same hand, we hope you can appreciate that you need some help with a disease called addiction, and that you are in the right place with the right support to get what you need. Sometimes, the medicine that we need is bitter to the taste, but if it makes us well, then it's worth taking.

What Have You Done To Me?

What have you done to me?
Girl, I love you. Love is very powerful and I gave you those words. Girl, I meant what I said, you is my world. I put my whole trust in you and gave you my heart. I was real, you was real to me. It was love at first sight.
What have you done to me?
Girl, I change my ways for you. I made you my only one. I would never hurt you. You was my life, dreams and feather. I would've married you. I love you until death to part.
What have you done to me?
Girl, you told me you loved me and you said you meant it. We had kinda argued about it, but I put away my thought and believed you.
What have you done to me?
Girl, look at us now… no, actually look at me. For what you done to me is putting me on my death bed, killed out my house and in rehab because of you.
What have you done to me?
I can't be true to other. I can't believe someone else when they say I love you, like you, or care. I got no trust. I haven't been able to move on.
What have you done to me?
I hurt others now. I haven't been myself. I don't believe in love. I don't believe period.
What have you done to me?

-Doloris

From The Beat: Well, Doloris, we can tell that this is very important to you, and that you think life is just about over because the love of your life has decided it's quits. All we can say is that we've all been there one time or another, and even though it feels like the end of your world right now, we are sure you won't always feel this way. In fact, we're sure that you will fall in love again, and with your new love, the pain you feel at this moment will evaporate into nothing more than a distant memory. (By the way, she didn't put you in rehab. You put yourself there. That's one of the lessons we hope you learn at PSK, because you will always find "reasons" to use, but whatever those reasons are, using will always be your choice and your pain.)

From A Beat Writer

Man, did I not write somethin' distasteful before, Beat cats? Well, I'll state what's on my mind again…

Sometimes y'all stay tryna knock us. Can't we not get reminded of being locked up, away from home all da time locked up.

But keep it up 'cause y'all keep us motivated.

-Crackhead

From The Beat: We can understand why it would get under your skin to be reminded constantly of where you are and why. But we try to respond to the piece before us. So, when someone writes that they're going back to the block to smoke a blunt, or back to their "boys" to post on the block, etc., we can only respond by saying where we think that leads. The subject of "love" gives us yet another opportunity to do that, because by allowing yourself to be taken away from those you love, you've shown that you love something else even more. (Oops! There we go again… Sorry… Stay motivated…)

Can't we not get reminded of being locked up, away from home all da time locked up.

From The Beat Writer

Well, I have a lot of respect for y'all. But yeah, for my last pieces y'all said I was tryin' to ask permission to leave when I wasn't asking that. I was asking to let go. I love her so much that I want the love to stop but it just hasn't gone away.

-Doloris

From The Beat: We're sorry we misunderstood what you wrote. But we stand by what we wrote in your other piece ("What have you done to me?"), which is that the love you feel will begin to fade away when you meet that next special person in your life. We have no special advice about how to get her out of your mind… except to fill your time with other activities.

Stabbed In The Heart

Man, Beat, like I said once, y'all always tryna get tha stuff outta ya. Man, now this? Been through so much bs, this would be an essay. Let's see…

So much tough shhh, it's why I'm not an open person. It's why I trust nobody on my neck. It's why I can't carry the heat on the outs.

Nowadays, ninjas ain't respectin' shhh but dey money. I wish I could take everything I did back, but hey, life moves on, and what I did will follow me…

To all my readers, than you, thank you for your support. I will continue to write.

-Maria The Crackhead

From The Beat: We really wish you'd stop calling yourself "Tha Crackhead" because we think it gives you an excuse to live up to your name… Anyway, we're really sorry that you've experienced so much shhh in so short a life, but that doesn't mean it will always follow you. It's time to start building a more positive karma because what you give is what you get. (Or, as the Beatles once sang, "The love you take is equal to the love you make.")

Strangers Have The Authority

Why do we treat strangers better than those we love? Wanna really, really know? Man, 'cause y'all got authority. We gotta be nice an' shhh. What dey expect? Oh, an' 'cause it's like you neva know who that person is.

Well, personally, I'm coo'. Keep da yap closed. Neva run my mouth.

-Crackhead

From The Beat: We think you're onto some important things in this piece. If those strangers didn't have authority, are you saying you would not treat them with respect? What can be done so that everyone is respected, whether they have so-called authority or not?

Stranger Aren't Hurt By Words That I Say

I do feel that sometimes I do treat strangers better than those we love. I do that because they aren't hurt by words that I say. For example, if I say, "What up?"to a vato and start doping up, I could never talk to my mom or dad.

-Derek

From The Beat: Who is they? Are you talking about strangers or your family? What makes you think that you can hurt their feelings? Have they told you?

I Didn't Understand What Death Meant

When I was very young, I found out that my mom died. My dad told me. I really didn't understand at first.

-Young bro

From The Beat: It looks like you didn't finish what you started to write. Why don't you continue on this topic? How did your dad explain your mom's death to you? How did you learn to understand what death means? How do you think your mom would have responded to your incarceration and your way of living?

We Know How Loved Ones React

I think we treat strangers better because we don't know them. We treat loved ones because we know how they will react. We don't know if we might say something that might offend the stranger.

-Lauren

From The Beat: That's called, not showing love to those who love us. It shouldn't be the other way around. When you said, "we," are you including yourself as well? If not, how do you treat your family and strangers? Do you treat them equally?

I Don't Trust Anyone

I don't treat strangers as well as I treat everyone else in my life that I know well, because I don't know who they are or what they'll do. I put up a shield before I know the person, so they're not able to get to know who I really am. I don't trust anyone, so I'm not completely one hundred percent nice and considerate to everyone. Trusting someone is leaving you vulnerable to get hurt, betrayed, or backstabbed by them.

-Jess

From The Beat: Someone or some people must have already hurt or betrayed you pretty profoundly, Jess, for you to be basically distrustful of them. But that's your experience. When you get to know people, do you ever eventually learn to trust them, at least figure out when and where you may be able to trust them? Everyone makes mistakes and everybody is basically concerned about him or herself, but they can still become your true, if imperfect, friend. Can they also trust you 100%?

Hella Mad!

I woke up this morning hella mad, 'cause I'm still in here, hella mad.

-Lil' Dayasha

From The Beat: Who or what are you mad at? At yourself for being in such a situation?

What I Did To Be Here

I woke up this morning, thinking about what I did to be here. It wasn't really much, because I just violated my bracelet.

-Johnny

From The Beat: But you must have messed up somehow to be on the bracelet, right, Johnny? So why not include that in your thoughts? It may help teach you not to repeat it, so you won't get into any more mess and keep you free!

When I Wake Up

When I wake up in the morning, I think, "Damn, I want to go home, but I can't, 'cause I got to do my time."

-Soulja Slim

From The Beat: Besides doing your time, have you thought about doing positive things that can help you fix your life? If not, you should.

I put up a shield before I know the person, so they're not able to get to know who I really am.

No More Treating Strangers Like They're Not Human

I don't know why I treat strangers like they're not human. When I get out, I think I will be polite to everybody I meet. Usually I don't. I will end up back in here.

-Deryell

From The Beat: That's a good idea. You should treat people the same way you want them to treat you. Right? What else are you going to change from your attitude?

I Love The Beat!

I love The Beat!

-Lady Heather

From The Beat: And we love you.

This Who I Am

Man, what's up wit' it?
This yo' boy, Young So G
aka Macadamian Nut
Yo' boy
I'm a stunna
I wear stunna glasses
I ride scrapers
I like the sound of suction pipes
I make beats for E-40

-Young So G

From The Beat: Really!? We can't see any of these things you speak on. Why is that?

Court Is On My Mind

I woke up this morning and thought about court.
I did not know what was going to happen.
I hate this place. I just got out of court.
I found out I have to wait 'til October 11th
to find out when I leave.
I might be going to placement.
I don't treat people bad at all—only if they mess with me.

-Big T

From The Beat: Be patient! Your time will come soon. The question is, how long will you keep your freedom? Do you have any plans to keep yourself out of trouble?

Ambulance

I feel hella mad that individuals is always talking. My homies and I still doing it, moving. Your boy been moving since I was born. I am still from my hometown, living in Marin juvy, been wiggling since birth.

I want to be out of here so I could eat some McDonald's.

-Hungry for McD's

From The Beat: Individuals have been talking since the beginning of time. Yes, that creates mess, but that's also how people learn from others' experience, so they can cope better. What have you been up to since you've been wiggling? Why don't you write The Beat something about your young life, since birth?

Probation

I have taken everything you have thrown at me and you have failed. You still have not broken me. So I sit here with a smile and two hands, each holdin' one finger up.

-Jake The Mic

From The Beat: It's good that you don't let anything break your spirit. But are the restrictions you're experiencing teaching you anything valuable? We hope so, 'cause being stubborn will not get you far at all.

What's Up On The Outs?

I woke up this morning, thinking of what my friends are doing and what's happening outside.

-Charlie

From The Beat: What do you imagine your friends are doing this morning? What would you be doing if you were home?

Me Gusta Lo Que Hago

Hey, que pedo homie? Aqui escribiendo de nuevo. Espero que este vato de Beat Within me ponga en el cuaderno en Beat. Por una parte, sí quiero salir, pero por la otra parte, me da lo mismo porque tengo que regresar aqui. Por una parte, si me duele no poder estar con las personas que amo, pero tengo que seguir haciendo lo que hago porque me gusta hacerlo.

Pues, vatos, les quiero hablar un poco de mí. Primeramente Dios, para el otro año, salga de aqui. Pues, les escribo la próxima semana porque me le eche encima a un vato y me fregue la mano. Yo no puedo escribir más porque me duele. Un saludo a todos.

From The Beat: Con lo que has dicho, nos das a entender que prefieres seguir haciendo lo que te gusta que a tu familia. ¿Como es posible que prefieras a algo que no vale la pena que a las personas que siempre han estado contigo? Tienes que pensar mucho hasta reflecionar en las cosas que estas haciendo antes que sea demaciado tarde. Personas con pensamientos como tú, son los que terminan en malos pasos, arrepentidos, solos, y llenos de arrepentimiento. No seas uno de esos.

I Like What I Do

Hey, what's up homie? I'm just here writing again. I hope that this dude from The Beat Within puts me in the pages of The Beat. On one half, yes, I want to get out, but on the other half, I feel the same because I have to come back to this place. On one half, yes it does hurt me that I cannot be with the people I love, but I have to continue doing what I do because I like doing what I do.

Well, dudes, I want to talk to y'all a little bit about myself. First off, if God's willing, next year, I'll be out of here. Well, I'll write to y'all next week because I went off on a dude and I messed up my hand. I can't write anymore because my hand hurts. A shout-out goes out to all people.

-Soldado LCRS

From The Beat: Based on what you wrote, we have the impression that you prefer doing what you like to do than being with your family. We don't understand how you can prefer something that is not worth giving your attention to than the people who have always been there for you. You have to think a lot, even reflect, on the things that you are doing before it's too late. People who think like you are the people that end up following bad paths, remorseful, alone, and full of regret. Don't be one of them.

Duele Mucho Perder A Tus Seres Qurido

Lo que me dolio perder fue a mi abuelita. Ella para mí, era como mi madre porque me cuido cuando estaba pequeño. Para mi mala suerte, no pude ver cuando ella se murió ni cuando la enterraron.

Me duele la muerte de mi hermano. Lo mataron por andar en pandillas y tampoco pude ver cuando lo enterraron. Mi otro hermano estubo en prisión por ocho años y nunca pude ir a verlo. Gracias a Dios el ya salió. Todo esto me dolio mucho y nunca lo puedo olvidar. Los guacho.

From The Beat: Sentimos mucho la pérdidas de tu abuelita y de tu hermano. Estos son seres queridos muy cercanos y sabemos el dolor que se siente no tenerlos más. Desgraciadamente has estado viviendo una vida muy triste y se te seguirá siendo triste si continuas en el camino que sigues. Si ya has pasado mucho, deberías de buscar la manera como evitar traer más tristeza a tu vida. La vida sigue dependiendo de lo que haya pasado en tu pasado. No dejes que el resto de tu vida termine como una historia triste. Recuerda que toda su historia tiene su final feliz. ¿Tendra su final feliz la tuya?

It Hurts A Lot To Lose Your Loved Ones

What hurt me to lose was my grandmother. For me, she was like my mother because she took care of me when I was little. Because of my bad luck, I was not able to see when she died, nor when they buried her.

The death of my brother hurts me. They killed him for being in a gang and I was also not able to see when they buried him. My other brother was locked up in prison for eight years and I was never able to go see him. Thanks to God, he is already out. All of this hurt me a lot and I am never able to forget about these things. I'll see y'all later.

-Cruz LCRS

From The Beat: We deeply regret to hear about the losses of your grandmother and of your brother. These are very close loved ones and we understand the pain that you must feel not having them around. Unfortunately, you have been living a very sad life and it will continue to be sad if you continue to go down the same path you're following. Since you've already been through so much, you should search for a way to avoid bringing more sadness to your life. Life goes on regardless of what has happened in your past. Don't let the rest of your life finish with a sad ending. Keep in mind that not all stories have a happy ending. Will yours have a happy ending?

I can't write anymore because my hand hurts.

Mis Pensamientos De Los Temas

Fue hace poco tiempo, mas o meno dos meses. Sierto familiars que nos habíamos llevado. Todo iba bien y pensaba que todo iba a ser siempre igual, pero cuando yo les pedi que me ayudaran para estar en este pais, me dijeron que si me ayudarían. Cuando estaba en Arizona, había que pagar cierta cantidad de dinero. Me dieron la espalda cuando más los necesitaba. Eso fue como una puñalada en el corazón. Sólo le pido a Dios que me ayude a olvida esto y que siempre me ayude en todo.

En mi punto de vista sobre porque tratar mejor a los extraños que a tus propios familiars. Aveces tu familia te trata mal, te desprecia, no te dan palabra de aliento cuando tienes problemas. Es ahí cuando aparece alguién o un amigo y te trata de dar ánimos. Siempre trata de que te sientas bien cuando tienes un problema.

Esta mañana me lebante y le di gracias a Dios por un día más de vida que me daba. Le dije, "señor, cuando podre salir de aqui." En ese mismo momento algo se vino a mi mente y me dijo, "ten paciencia que cuando menos esperes vas a salir de aqui. Eso me hizo sentir muy bien. Le doy gracias a Dios por eso.

From The Beat: Sentimos mucho que tu familiars te hayan dado la espalda cuando más lo necesitabas. ¿Pudistes preguntar porque no pudieron ayudarte? A lo mejor estaban en una situación bien crítica economicamente. Dios nos dio el don de perdonar para que perdonemos aquellos quienes nos hacen daño. ¿Crees que llegues a perdonar a estos familiars tuyos? Tienes a tu Dios quien te da esa fuerza y ánimo para seguir adelante, no pierdas las esperanzas en El.

My Thoughts On The Topics

It was not too long ago, more or less two months, certain family members that had brought us. Everything was cool and I thought that everything was going to stay the same. When I asked them to help me get to this country, they told me that, yes, they would help me. But when I was in Arizona, I had to pay a certain amount of money. They turned their backs on me when I needed their help the most. That was like taking a knife to the heart. I just ask God to help me forget that incident and to always help me in everything.

In my point of view, why treat strangers better than your own family members? Sometimes your family treats you bad. They look down on you, and they don't give you words of support when you have problems. That's when someone appears or a friend and they try to give you encouragement. They always try to make you feel better when you have problems.

This morning, I woke up and I thanked God for giving me another day of life. I told Him, "Lord, when will I be able to get out of here?" At that same moment, something came to my mind and told me, "Have patience because when you least expect it, you're going to get out of this place." That made me feel better. I thanks God for that.

-Darwin B4

From The Beat: We deeply regret to hear that your family members turned their backs on you when you needed them the most. Were you able to ask them why they turned their backs on you? Maybe they were in a very critical economic situation? God gave us the ability to forgive so we could forget those who have caused us harm. Do you believe you'll ever be able to forgive these family members of yours? You have your God who gives you that strength and encouragement to continue forward. Don't lose your hope in Him.

Mis Respuestas Sobre Dos Temas

Es demaciado dificil curar las heridas del corazón porque son heridas profundas. Tal vez se olvide, pero siempre queda un pedacito de dolor. Lo que más quisiera uno es alegarlas lo más largo posible para olvidarla.

Tratamos mejor a los extraños porque son extraño. Uno no valora lo que tiene hasta que lo pierde. Es como que vayas con un amigo y te trompieces con otra persona, la otra persona le pides disculpa. Tu amigo mira como te disculpastes. Al trompezarte con el, no mira la misma reacción con la que te disculpastes con el extraño.

From The Beat: Si es verdad, esas heridas son muy dificil de curar. ¿Te han herido de esta manera alguna vez? ¿O has herido a alguién de esta forma alguna vez? Es verdad, uno no valora a lo que tiene hasta que lo pierde o lo ve perdido. ¿Te ha pasado esto a ti? ¿Por qué crees que uno valora a lo que no tiene que valorar?

My Responses To Two Topics

It is extremely difficult to cure the wounds in one's heart because they are profound wounds. Maybe you might forget about them, but a little piece of pain always remains. What one wishes they could do the most is distance yourself from them as far as possible so you can forget about them.

We treat strangers better because they are foreign to you. One doesn't value what one has until one loses it. It's like you're walking with a friend and you bump into another person and you ask the other person to forgive you. When you bumped into that other person, he doesn't see that same reaction with which you excused yourself with the stranger.

-Dimas B2

From The Beat: Yes, it is true; those wounds are very difficult to cure. Have you ever been hurt this way before? Or have you ever hurt someone this way before? It is also true that one does not value what one has until one has lost it or sees themselves about to lose it. Has this ever happened to you? Why do you believe one values what one shouldn't value?

GARY HALLFORD ***Courage is one of the most misused words in our dictionary because there are a whole lot of factors that determine whether an act is courageous or not. Some may think that being on the block hustling and bustin' heads is courageous, while others think that going to school no matter what anyone else thinks is courageous. Our environments have taught us different ways to define courageous, but Gary breaks it down in a way we are made to agree with. And the best part is he gives scenarios and lets you decide for yourself. He's writing from California State Prison — Solano in Vacaville, CA. And we'd like you to read on and re-evaluate your idea of what it means to have 'courage'.***

On Courage

When most of us think of courage, it's in an abstract form that does not have direct connection with what's happening to us at the very minute. We think about old John Wayne movies, or some of the television shows that depict someone doing some "Heroic" action, the problem is, that most people do not take time to actually consider what courage really is, and what it can actually be defined as. Further, some of the actions that are considered as "courageous" in the jail or prison context are in reality a sign of blatant cowardice. The question though, is not how you think of others, but how you think of yourself and whether or not you're being honest with yourself...

Perhaps the easiest way to explain the difference between the two concepts, is to provide some examples, and let you make your own decision. I do no profess to know anything that you don't already know... the only thing I'm doing is allowing you to view reality with your own eyes and make your own decisions. Whether or not I agree with your decision is immaterial, what's important, is that you take time to think about these scenarios, and consider the implications with you in a "Key point":

Option 1: you're on the street and an acquaintance asks you to come with him on a drug buy. You're already on probation for possession and the judge has said in no uncertain terms that if he ever saw you again in his courtroom, you'd spend the next several (months/years) in jail or prison. You tell your acquaintance that you're on probation and you can't go. He/she begs and pleads, saying they're afraid to go to that (block/part of town/city) without backup. How do you respond?

Option 2: you're in custody (reason unimportant), and while you're just "kicking it" on your bunk, an acquaintance tell you that he was 'disrespected' by a member of another race, and wants to fight him. He's been going around and getting a whole group who "have his back." As you start to ask what the key problem was, rather than give you an answer, he makes some comment saying "you're either with us, or against us," and make a threatening gesture. How do you respond?

Option 3: you're still in custody and another acquaintance asks you to hold something in your locker. This acquaintance has a habit of staying in trouble and the custody staff watch him like a hawk. He does not tell you what it is he wants you to "stash" but instead comes with "Hey, Homey..." and tries to convince you to help out. What do you do?

Option 4: still in custody there acquaintances have someone in an area where they are no visible by staff or other inmates and are beating some person severely. He is defenseless and at risk of serious injury or death. What do you do?

Option 5: regardless of where you are, you know of someone who has contracted a serious illness, and may possibly pass it on to others. This person refuses to acknowledge that he has this disease and refuses to obtain treatment. With your limited medical background, you know that his behavior (sharing needles, food service, unprotected sex, etc...) places several peoples lives/health at risk. How do you respond to this threat?

Through they have been few between, we have witnessed certain acts of courage that impacted the lives of either a single person, or vast numbers of people. Some examples of these actions are as follows

Tiananmen Square: after two days on incessant violence, and some significant casualties, the Chinese Military decided to send an Armored Division (Tanks) into downtown Beijing, to quell the disturbance. One morning, while western cameras were filming, expected further blood-bath, the tanks started to proceed into Tiananmen Square. The streets were empty and everyone was afraid of what lay ahead...when one solitary man, carrying his grocery bags, walked in front of the tanks! The tank tried to turn...and he turned with it. Screaming at the top of his lungs "What are you doing? we are not a threat! Why are you doing this?" though the solitary act of one frightened man, the tanks stopped (at least for that day.)

University of Wisconsin (1967): As is normal on almost every college campus, various "job fairs" and recruitment activities occur. One of these visitors to the University of Wisconsin was Dow Chemical, the maker of "Napalm" (a jelled gasoline substance used as a "defoliant"). The students chose not to participate in the "job fair," and wished to protest the allowance of such an unacceptable manufacturer. They staged a "sit-in," demanding that Dow Chemical not be allowed on the school grounds. Rather than allow Campus Security to handle the situation, the Dean called the Madison Police Department. What followed, can be best described as a "police riot" with countless injuries to those who had I chose to peacefully protest...

Rosa Parks: Ms. Parks did not want to be a hero, and really wasn't all that interested in the Civil Rights movement, but she had gotten off of work, and was dead tired, during those days, in Alabama a black person could not sit in certain parts of city buses. The back of the bus being full, she sat in an area that was restricted to white riders. When a white man came up and told her to move, she said no. For that act of "defiance" she was jailed...as a result, for the next year and a half, no blacks rode the buses (peaceful resistance), and the rules were changed.

Rachel Corrie: very few people in this country know of her, but she was a British Human Rights activist. Several years ago, while protesting the Israeli government's destruction of houses and other Palestinian property, she was standing atop a pile of dirt being moved by a bulldozer. She fell. The bulldozer didn't stop and ran over her several times. Needless to say, she died fairly rapidly...

This list could go on for another hundred pages, and several of my picked would be controversial...but life is filled with controversy. Question: what's the difference between a terrorist and a freedom fighter? Answer: which side are you on? The point is that in order to make decisions, you must pay attention to what the real question is. You can follow someone blindly, but does that qualify as adulthood? As courage? In order to make a decision, you have to figure out if there is something to answer. (Don't you just love thinking for yourself?)

Like I said at the outset, it's not my place to tell you what to do. That's a challenge that only you can understand by experiencing the headache that comes with growing up. Some of you may consider that as a "cop-out", and you're free to think that way. But what if... what if you're life depended on the next decision you made? What if you could help someone, and chose to keep your mouth shut? What if you were the only person on the planet that this other person would listen to but you kept your mouth shut? Worse yet, what if you spent all of your time watching television and playing video games and not learning things that could help that person in need?

Another question: Which takes more courage, hanging on the corner with the "homies" or breaking away to study something that may benefit NOT ONLY YOURSELF but your family, friends, neighborhood, city, state, county, or planet? Are you brave hanging on that corner, selling dope, and hurting your customers? Or, are you more courageous taking the time to help the neighbor kid fix his bicycle or work on his math problem? Are you a big, brave man, by beating up some defenseless old lady, or forcing her to empty her ATM allotment so you can buy some rocks? Or are you more courageous, by helping her install storm windows, and safely make it home from the grocery store without being mugged by some punk?

Is it courageous to keep your mouth shut, and watch abusive tactics employed by anyone? Or is it better to stand up and say "NO! Not on my watch!" These are questions that will bother people of all ages, but only if they neglect the responsibility that being a part of society requires. Anything in between, and you're allowing someone else to make your decisions for you. Do you call that courage? How about adulthood? These are questions you must answer for yourselves. Choose well, there are many alternatives, but you have to live with your choices.

Accept

Accept is a big thing for me because I want so much to be liked. I know deep down inside I'm a good person. The problem is having others see that in me. Sometimes I think the problem is me. I feel like I'm not good enough or something not right because people are "judging" me before getting to know me. I say to myself, "Why is that," I look back at my past and try to understand "Who am I really," what I come to understand I'm "Human." I've made a lot of "mistakes." I'm a "survive" I'm "Positive" when I need to be. I'm nice, kind , funny, bright. I love to do hair, I'm good at it, a beautiful heart, a good listener, always there to give a helping hand but at times that's not good enough and I just don't know why.

All my life I never wanted nothing but "acceptance and love" but it never came, "Drugs" was my acceptance and love, but I did not like the after feeling and I still did not get what I wanted most "acceptance and love," sometimes I always thought it was better to die than to live through pain, heartache, rejection. I mean who am I playing it's hard to be accepted but I never knew it was hard to be both, life is "evil" I always new that growing up but as I got older I try to see good in this "evil world" I will say I'm a "survivor" no longer a "victim" I learn to accept the things I can't change but the things I could I work hard on that.

Sometimes I say to myself I would love to be "perfect." Now that's a very big word "perfect." So I would never make mistakes or feel the things I feel the world inside me would be on big happy family but I stop dreaming and come to "real life" that's the word I hate the most

"Real life," takes so much from you but I will say I gain a lot and love me and be okay with just being me, now that puts a smile on my face all the time .

LATOYA ***No matter how hard we are or how cruel our surroundings can be, one thing remains true — and that's everyone needs to feel loved and accepted. This next writer from the Connecticut Correctional Facility in Niantic, Connecticut, struggles with feeling like she belongs. People are way too judgmental in this society, so it's hard to find acceptance from others. Sometimes it's easier to just say forget everyone and learn to accept ourselves. For no matter what someone thinks of us, we are still going to be who we are. They can dislike it or love it, but we can't please everyone, so let's spend this day being selfish by being exactly who we are regardless of what others think — even our own mothers, which in her case would be a great idea. And you'll see why after you read her piece called, "My Mommy Love". Thank you for being so upfront with us. Keep in contact because we'd like to help as much as we can.***

Life

Life has teach me so much, I've gain so much from life, life was not always my best of friends because so much was taken from me in this life. Life took so much of my dreams, my secrets, my privacy. Life gave me so much BS. Life also gave me stability. It also staged me so much because I'm more of an adult than I ever was.

Life made me so "Respectable" about "Myself"
Life made me "Responsible" about my own "Consequences"
Life teach me to have more "Patience"
Life is a loving world, if we believe in it
Life will not past me by again, without giving myself
A second chance to become the person I know I can

When I was thirteen years old, she beat me so bad I ended up in a hospital bed. For three months she never came to visit me, never at that moment. I learned to understand and love my mommy more than ever because I knew that was the only way she knew how to love me.

Why Is Life So Hard...

Why is life so hard for me. I believe I'm not fit to be in this world but I keep trying to fit in but it keeps throwing me out. Remember being very young I was hated by the people I love. I could not understand why and I still don't believe I came from hell because ever since I came in this world I've been getting shhh on, "I hated life and life hated me," dying would have been a lot more easier.

This world is "evil" no matter how hard I tried to stay on the right road. Evil was always behind me taking over my life. I have no friend I just got me "I just hated life itself" it never seems to get any better. Everything I touch dies or leaves without a reason why. I used to love to dream but not anymore because they don't come true. I pray to God but he act like he don't hear my cries for help. I'm locked in a cell with no help from the man above who's supposed to help me. Why is life so hard for me.

I can't seem to get it right no matter what I do. I'm lonely and scared but no one comes to help. I cry because I don't want this to be the end for me. I fight and fight to make ends with hell. It's not easy I must say because it wants me anyway but I will fight into the end until something comes my way and when it do it will be mine to keep.

I always tell myself life is what I make of it but damn why does it have to be so hard. I tell myself there's got to be an easy was out of "Hell," I can't go back to my past because there nothing left for me to go back to. So I move forward but I scared as hell to make that big step because hell can be waiting right there for me but I know this is the only chance I get so I will fight and fight until I get it right.

My Mommy Love...

My mommy love was beating me, never having time to listen or understand me — never believe me when I told her, her boyfriends was touching me. My mommy loved her drugs and streets and boyfriends more than she loved me. She was always ashamed of me. I never got the words "I love u daughter."

When I got raped by my father and I told her she still welcomed my father back in her world without a second thought. My mommy knew my father raped me because I'm not the first he has done this to. When I was thirteen years old, she beat me so bad I ended up in a hospital bed. For three months she never came to visit me, never at that moment. I learned to understand and love my mommy more than ever because I knew that was the only way she knew how to love me.

Though my whole life, I never hated or blame my mommy for what she done to me. She was very sick from drugs. It took so much from her to where she did not love herself no more. If I had to pick my mommy or my past I would pick my mommy because no matter what she does to me I'm going to always love her no matter what.

That's what my mommy love is to me...

WILLIAM M. THURSTON

This next writer is one of our more consistent and inquiring as he drops about five poems on us today. He's writing from the Deuel Vocational Institution in Tracy, CA, and we've been waiting to hear from him. He asks really good questions and provides some even more incredible answers. His heart is enormous and he's really fluent in its language as he strings words along together to form the most beautiful banner of wisdom. We can't wait until we hear more from him because he always makes our 'black and white' pages a little more colorful.

I'm not attacking you boo,
I'm just keeping it real,
Based on the facts
And the way that I feel.

Sticks

They call me sticks,

Maybe because-a the way
I wear my hair,
Or because-a the way
My studs click when I walk,
And the way I hunch my shoulders
And pop my colla
Whenever I talk about street shhh,

Or maybe because-a the way
I sing
Or move mountains
And fill sunny Brooks,

Or maybe it's because-a my looks

Because-a my brown eyes
Or wide nostrils
My black freckles
And my full lips,

Maybe it's because-a my kicks
And my two-piece 'fits-
My summer gear
And my winter-wear
And my turtle-necks.

Or maybe it's because-a my boo-ga-loo
And my robot
And my apple-hats,
Or because-a the way I feel,
Afterwards,
Whenever I read one of Nikki's poems.

They call me sticks,

Maybe b'cause-a the way
I take back to childhood memories
At the drop of a hat,
Like my brothers orange and black
Varsity "throw-back" football jacket
I always felt I was never worthy enough to wear,

Or "teen night" at Bushrod Park,
Or like when it was cool to throw house parties
Or to shut down whole city blocks,
Just me,
Mama's 8- track,
My childhood sweetheart
And a handful of my friends.

They call me sticks.

Daydreaming On A Dock

Somewhere lonely there's a dock,
Where one man sits on its edge alone
With no shoes or no socks

Where bare-feet
Wade in a water's wake
And lost without thoughts
That even the dreamer fears.

A place where
Beginnings and ends never kiss.
A place where
A blind man shoots arrows at sparrows
And never misses.

And all within a matter of seconds
His life has become
Neither too short or too fast
And he's lost to the voids
Of his own imagination.

Oblivion,

A place where
Even the highest tides abandon,
The tight spaces between his toes

Then and only then
Will he be allowed to come back.

Keeping It Real

There's nothing wrong
With you feeling for somebody else,
Just as long as there's still a little something
For "me" in your heart left

Yeah, I admit
I ran the streets and I do what I do,
But none of that has ever interfered or changed
The way that I've ever felt about "you"

You've claimed that I'd played games with your mind
And that your heart I've hurt-
That I'd lied, cheated, and broke promises,
And that I'd treated you like dirt.

But the truth of the matter
Is that you were fragile and afraid,
To fully commit to the relationship
Because of the mistakes that "you've" made!

It wasn't something that "I" said,
Or anything that "I'd" done wrong-
It was your low self-esteem
And your fear to love me completely all along.

I just pray that one day
You'll come to realize
That "my" heart has been broken too before,
And that there are also years in "my" eyes!

I'm not attacking you boo,
I'm just keeping it real,
Based on the facts
And the way that I feel.

So whether we're together as lovers or friends,
Or "whatever " the hell we may be,
Rest assured that I'll never let "anything come between
what's there between you and me!

WILLIAM M. THURSTON (CONT.)

Another Black Poem

If I ever wanted to write another black poem
I'd have to eat, sleep, drink and think black
In order to wirte about black things-

Black things like how back in the days Black Folks
Picked pecans and cotton. And about Aunt Minnies fruit salads,
And how she'd split peas and crack corn under the afternoon sun.

I'd have to write about things like the Afro-Pick with the clinched fist, and about how my uncle Sammy-Joe had a drinking problem
And would Poor Schlits Malt into everything he ate.
And about how Melba's cornbread tasted like cake.
And about some of the people I know, like Carl Huff,
And my momma's brothers, L.H, Londell and red.

I'd have to write about people like Nikki Giovanni, Rosa Parks and Langston Hughes. Sojouner Truth, Dr. Martin Luther King, Mandella and Desmond Tutu.

I'd have to write about the Oppression and the conflicts. The Demonstrations and the riots. The lynchings, and about what the colors red, black, green and yellow "really" stand for.

Part Two:
But if I ever wanted to write another really "good" black poem, I'd actually have to "be" black! Have black friends and have black dreams. I'd have to grow up in black neighborhoods and attend black school.

I'd have to have black girlfriends and play with black toys. I'd have to watch black television shows read black books and listen to black music and songs — have a black wife and raise black kids.

I would have to have actually walked in a pair of black shoes in order to successfully capture the essence of another black poem, or even to write about black things.

Life In General

There's a potential for a catastrophe in every man's heart. On the other hand a woman's expectations are difficult to achieve, and her manipulations are misleading; distorting our thoughts, and far too complicated to grasp or comprehend.

However, what we've seen in others from past or present experiences, it turns out laughers into crying shames. Liquid guilt and envies; our tears leaving permanent scars.

O' what a world this could've been without the sufferings of consequences and second thoughts. Without shame or remorse or guilt. Or without the innocence of a child. Or without even the time of day to pay more attention to "anything" other than our own ignorance and stupidities.

And why do we continue to struggle when the system had washed and dried their hands with us a long-long time ago?

Dying Eyes

Isn't it obvious
That this is the way
That I'm supposed to feel
Whenever I write a poem
Or when I got the mini-mart
And bring back peanuts
When I should 'a brought you cashews?
When I'd taken physics
When I should 'a took piano lessons
Or sociology;
Psychology
Or criminology.
Any-ology except cosmetology
Because I just don't give-a damn about faces
Except for those I see
When I can't sleep
And I'm up all night
Watching infomercials
And little swollen-bellied kids
With their fingers in their mouths
Are smiling into the camera
But on the inside they're dying
And if we'd looked close enough
We could've caught it in their eyes

What Is Poetry?

What is poetry?
An R&B lyric to a Toni Braxton tune?
A hint of tint from a vintage Cadillac fender?
Or the crossroad where two lovers meet
And kiss for the very first time;
Where they lose themselves in an embrace
That'll last forever?

Is it something you can taste
Or smell
Or see?
Or is it something to be touched,
Or to be confined
Or to be set free?

Is it black and white minds like this,
Or black and yellow dreams like this,
Or black and brown hands like this,
Entwined like vines in a twisted mix
Of complexities for a quick remedy fix?

What "is" poetry?
Our ghettos devine
When voices like mine sing,
"the hell with the need to get rich!
What about the homeless
And the dead-beat dads
And our brothers and sisters
Who are dying every day overseas"

Is it the clickety-clack
Of a Clydesdales hoof,
Or the flippery-flap of a loose shingle
On a log cabin roof?

Or the different scenes and opinions
We all perceive
From the very same masterpiece,
As we stand there,
A mere three feet away from it,
Lost in thought,
Arms in a fold,
And our chins
In the palms of our hands?

WILLIAM M. THURSTON (CONT.)

A Poem For Michael Jackson

Guess what Mike,
I got news for you.
Billie Jean never "did" claim
That you were the father of her son!

As a matter-a-fact,
Rumor has it that you and her
Never ever even did it at all!

But you didn't hear it from me.

Who am I?
O' I'm nobody really.
But you can consider me a friend,
Or just another one of those brothas
Who's been following your career
Since the beginning of time that's all.

I think we're the same age Mike.
We might even wear the same shoe size too.
But I think I'm a little more handsome
Than you were when you put out
That soundtrack to "Ben" 25-30 years ago.

Don't take it the wrong way though;
Everything I touch withers,
But whatever "you" feel turns to gold.
And every breath I take loses freshness,
While every word you speak goes platinum
After every million sold.

But still,
I spend the majority of my time
Feeling sorry for you,
And if I could I'd send you
A box full of my childhood experiences
Because I know you could use 'em.

But have you ever
Experienced puppy-love?

Signed,
Still and always,
Your #1 fan.

But there's a bottom line to "the life"
and it boils down to this,
Sometimes we pay dearly for what our hearts desire."
And tho' the fame is cool
and the fortune even better,
We should seriously consider stepping down soon to our retire.

The Broadway Hustler

Allow me to introduce myself-
I believe in the pursuance of higher Education,
Therefore, I chose to further "mine" on the street-
Graduating with honors at the top of my class,
Now I'm a Ph.D in ghetto-ometry and hustle-ology.
On the streets of Broadway I learned to read and follow the signs,
And I learned that the more I had the more I could get.
I accumulated public relations, communications and leadership skills,
A business Intellect and accounting, and I master gross incomes, profits and net.
My motto is plain and simple see:
"zip the lip, follow the script and stay sucka-free."
"take very few risks and he least losses possible,"
"and be quick to drop a fifty to bubble by all means necessary."
I'm usually not straight forward and boasting about these things,
But after all, the basis of "my" poetry is that I keep it real,
And I've perfected the art of elimination by the process of separation
with the way I conducted my business combined with my writing skill.
Now just being out there on the playing field was "one" thing.
But to actually be on the roster and a starting player was something else
Hustling and bustling the line of scrimmage, backstreets and end zones,
"that's how I got a reputation and a name for "myself"!
but wait! I forgot to mention my faults and my addictions:
Fast money and fast cars- in that order,
And I preferred my women that way too,
But I was non-affiliated Dr. associated by the freedom of choice,
So I could wear "any color, red, purple, green, brown "or" blue!
But I've never knocked those who chose to be members,
It's just that I couldn't do "mine" like that.
I made the decision a long time ago to keep my hustling universal,
By merging my constituents To "all" nationalities, not just the black.
But there's a bottom line to "the life" and it boils down to this,
Sometimes we pay dearly for what our hearts desire."
And tho' the fame is cool and the fortune even better,
We should seriously consider stepping down soon to our retire.
Because how can we enjoy "anything" if we're taken away from it all?
It's like catching, The winning pass but then dropping, the ball.
Or like finding that perfect woman who's also a friend,
Only to lose her to the system because we're constantly in the pen.
Yes there's a cost we pay because we wanted to be boss,
And we have to chalk up our loses on a regular everyday-
And right here in prison we're simply last names and numbers,
And I the struggler,
The lonely-
A statistic-
But I'll forever be known as "Broadway"!

PRETTY BOY ***Inspired by one of our more prolific poets in Friskie, this next writer who is just as prolific, writes a piece "To All Dreamers." He says that he has a dream and a goal to become a rap star and that he's already halfway there. His dreams are really high because he kind of goes with the saying, 'You aim for the moon and you're bound to hit the stars.' If you aim high, you're bound to hit something in between and usually that's not too bad either. Friskie and so many others have such an incredible way with words that behind bars is the last place they should be. He's writing from Pleasant Valley State Prison in Coalinga, CA, and we really love a man who has the heart to give props where props are do. And if anybody in The Beat deserves props it's the wonderful Friskie. So we're thanking you for her ahead of time because if we know Friskie, she'll be thanking you too.***

To All Dreamers

(Attention: "Friskie")

Now before you turn the page just read this very important letter. It'll only take a few minutes of your time, and it might be the few minutes that change your life and future…

Everybody in life dreams… Dreams are so personal that they are deeply heart felt. I myself have many dreams but I know time is the only thing between making them all a reality… What about yours?

I want to give a shout out to "Friskie" in Camarillo, CA at Ventura Facility. Girl pay attention to all of this okay? As I read your "Rap/Song" (Living Part 2) in volume 11.30 pg. 50, (Right Next to mine on pg. 5) My mouth was open after reading it. Such real words and such talent it is incredible. You can go so far don't you know that? Look at the life you lived… People will respect what you spit because you lived that life. That is something that will encourage people to buy your music… because they will want to know what you got to say next.

My dreams are very high because I expect a lot of myself. I take my dreams very serious now and it's no longer just a dream… It's my priority! I've made some mistakes that might have gotten me away from achieving my dreams even sooner but I've learned from those mistakes.

Marvin Garcia the founder and head of "Ill Minded Productions" took a great liking to me inside of his lil' home studio, doing it up… Man I still remember some nights going 'till 4:30 am (laughs). I was his protégé and he wanted me to focus on my music and Drop the (C-Low) solo debut album. He was going to pay and fund it all but like a "fool" I kept on gang banging/selling kilo's of drugs/selling women/running organized crime/ etc. A few times I almost lost my life and one of those times I had "internal bleeding" and was almost paralyzed from being stabbed. My dreams and life flashed all up in front of my face. I almost lost the chance of making my dreams a reality…

When I was reading Friskie's pieces all kind emotions came up from one real person to another real person she has my utmost respects. One time I remember a girl who to this day I'm still madly in love with her name is "Leslie M."… She was the most beautiful girl I ever seen and always will. She helped me to see that all my dreams are attainable and helped me to find the true young man that I am. Now you may say "well what are some of your dreams?" Well I got a lot on my plate… Do you want a taste of what I'm going to get?

Well here you go: 1. I want to win some Grammy awards. 2. I want a 15 million dollar mansion. 3. I want to own my own private island. 4. I want a Rolls Royce Phantom. 5. I want to Ferrari 360 spider. 6. I want a Gulf Stream 6550 jet. 7. I want to start my own clothing lie. 8. I want to open up a string of high class night clubs. 9. I want a 115 foot yacht etc, etc. There a lot of other stuff I want to but I'm sure you get the point. I have about (35) manila envelopes packed with plans, floor plans, blue prints, costs to run the businesses, designers who want to design my clothes, contact info, prices of the items I want etc. I think out of all (35) of those manila envelopes the (smallest) one is roughly "96 pages long" when other rap artist look at it all they say, "C-Low your really about all this aren't you?" Suddenly I stop smiling, look straight into their eyes and say "Damn straight I'm serious!"

Everyday I study the Wall Street Journal I read Forbes Magazine, Smart Money, and a lot of other stuff as well. I've also just been taking correspondence courses in "Beg. Business". I know about (REIT's) Real Estate Investment Trusts, financial advising, off shore accounts, Mergers and Aq., accounting/ marketing, etc, etc. Like I said I take my dream very, very serious.

You may say "This dudes crazy (but) the wise will say "This dude's sharp" I want that money but do you know what the (smartest) types of money is?? It's the money that re-makes itself!! Remember it's two different things being "wealthy" and being "rich" I know a lot for being only 22 years old because I know in life nothing is for free, and aint nothing just going to be handed to me"

To achieve these dreams I've had to choose to make some changes. Change my attitude, change my friends, change my way of living etc. but one thing I know for sure is I will have all of it and more. I still remember being in the studio and having all the sexy bunnies their (girls), drinking Hennessy while making music. And everyone calling me "Blaxican" (laughs) when the fellas (rappers) would drink and want to drive we I would "stop" them at all costs because we were all family. J-Dog, Mr. Realz, Mr. Cash, Big. D, Me (C-Low), cannot forget about "Julia" who everyone said looked like a (playboy playmate) you keep on singing girl that voice is so very truly incredible! (The point of me saying all of this is dreaming is good, but a goal well accomplished is truly even better!)

Friskie and everyone else who has took the time to read this important letter do this: take all your wildest dreams and fantasies you got… got them?? Now double them and aim for that. Never limit yourself. The worst feeling I think you could even feel is never attempting to reach your dreams and growing up old. (Wow) talk about a mind trip!! For the last years of your life you will always wonder if you could have had it all and then some!! That got your attention huh? Good cause that's the whole point of this letter… shoot for your dreams and aim high.. You can do it and I can't express how important it is for you to know that.

A girl who's name is "Leslie McDowell" who has touched my life in many more ways then one, once shared this quote with me: "the heart feels things that the eye can't see, and knows what the mind can't understand" Before I conclude with that I want to say what is one of my most important dreams that's in my heart.. it's the last but never the least and is to get all that I have explained, to show you with actions and by doing so be a inspiration to all the young women & men who have those dreams. When you are at the least lowest of the low there is only one place left to go and that is straight to the top. (When I say "youngsters" I laugh because I myself am only 22. years old.)

J-Dog remember that bet we made about "platinum?" I'm going to hold you to that family! And lastly to "Friskie" who inspired me to write this article… you got a gift, so use and achieve your dreams the same goes to all of you dreamers one love.

Note, "Friskie" as I read your piece my heart goes to you as well as respect. But check this out girl… all that you put into gang banging all of that heart and commitment… Put only (half) of that into your music and see what happens… you would probably conquer the world!! Good luck and maybe I'll see you at the Grammy's one day! You never know…

My Love

Would you understand my love if I gave you a passionate kiss,
Or if I massaged your feet and your back making you feel a endless bliss…
A touch a caress a kiss or a whisper,
My level of sensual love can give a girl the shivers…
Forever caught in the moments consumed by your destiny,
Your worries suddenly fade whenever your next to me…
Simply puts its so much more then a dream cause I'm for real,
My body is solidly cut so many ladies want to feel…
You are to me but Moreso to yourself,
Make me your trophy man that stands forever on your shelf…
When I speak the word shelf understand I mean life,
If you want me then come get me but be prepared to pay the price…
That price is your commitment loyalty honestly,
'Cause in order to win this love then that must be the key….
So as I lay my pen down and put this poem to rest,
Remember that my love is so intense it will totally take your breath!!

INDIO ***One of our most favorite workshop participants is on the prowl again, having successfully graduated from Glen Mills School in Pennsylvania. We can't help but notice how much he's grown since we first met him. His heart has always been big, but it was just directed in some places that caused him a lot of heartache. This week he directs it to his little sister with a poem titled, "You Can Count On Me." And as we read it tears fill our eyes because we know there are a whole lot of youngsters in the world that have lost their older siblings to incarceration or even death. We know they need us, so we must do whatever it takes to be there for them. Then he goes on to dedicate a poem to his primo who passed on. With all the loss this young man has suffered it's a surprise as to how positive he's become. Maybe too much is enough for some of us. We're glad he finally got the picture. He's now writing as a free man in San Jose, Ca. We first met Indio in our workshops in Santa Clara County Juvenile Hall.***

You Can Count On Me

You can count on me
For I will never leave your side
Every time I speak your name
It is always done in pride
Each time I think about you
My heart fills with happiness
I know you cannot see me
But I know your hearing this
Don't ever be afraid
For I will walk with you
And unlike most that you will meet
This man will stay forever true
You are held in high regard
With you no other can compete
No matter what happens
My love for you will not grow weak
Before I allow you to be hurt
All the stars will fall from the sky
So if they ever got to you
It would mean that I've surely died
Rest assured
'cause on me you can depend
If my life expires before yours
I'll be there for you until my end
Walk freely in this life
As I will be there to protect
The single most beautiful rose
Will never know the meaning of neglect
All the things I've said to you
Will never be said to another
For this love that I've defined
Is straight from the heart of your loving brother

This poem is dedicated to my new born baby sister, Salma Diana R., born July 11th, 2006. I know I'm not there right now, but you already hold a big part of my heart. You will be a strong Chicana, and R. to the fullest. Love you baby sis, see you soon.

...your big bro

In A While

This ones for you Prima
Looking down from above
Though I will never see you again
Just know I'll always send my love
I remember those days
Which now seem so far behind
I remember laughing and joking
To the drama, eyes so blind
I barely remember
The last time that we met
Your sisters Quincenera
Do you remember that?
Since then, it's been awhile
We grew up and grew apart
Though time passed since I had seen you
You still were in my heart
From San Jose to Tulare
That's a long way to go
But from Pennsylvania to California
Seems like a lifetime, que no?
I never got the chance bro,
To pay my due respects
Before you went forever
And laid down to your peaceful rest
But blessed be you Primo
For you are deserving
Eternal happiness
For the righteous and the worthy
I'm not sure of when you left
Or the reason which surround it
When I heard the delayed news
My heart was raving and pounding
Damn it Primo
The tears, they just won't come
But the pain of realization
Leaves me down and feeling numb
This can't be true
But I'm done with the denial
I've accepted truth with pain
Primo... I will see you in awhile....

In Loving Memory of
Gilbert Rivera
Aka Cowboy

You live on Cowboy. I hope things are much better where you stand. I never got the chance to say goodbye, but it's all good, cause goodbyes are forever, and we'll be seeing each other. I love you homeboy, that's from the corazon. Keep them stars shining Bro, shed that bright light down upon us. Rest in Peace Carnal...

Dear Beat

What's up? How are you guys doing? (and girls) Well, as for me, I am doing very well, especially considering the fact that on Monday, July 24th, I will no longer be a resident of the Glen Mills Schools, as a matter of fact I will no longer be a resident of the state of Pennsylvania. 6:00 Monday morning, I'll be boarding a plane back to San Jose, and right now, I couldn't be happier.

After well over a year, I am very proud to say I leave here a high school graduate and even though my family was not present for the ceremony, I know that they were proud. Also, I leave here with an adjusted ALT score of 26, which will help me in pursuing an education of higher learning. So many other accomplishments, but those are probably the most important of them all!

My mind set it changed, Beat, changed for the better. I've got things on my mind and I know I am going to do well. For the first time in four long years, my family will be home together, with a new addition, Baby Salma. For a long time either my brother, my sister, or I have been locked up, but recently my sister was released from Elmwood, and my release date is close at hand. You can't beat coming home to a full house!

But the best thing I got going for me right now is motivation and support. I am motivated to do good, and to stand by my word. I have applied to San Jose State University, in hopes of being accepted. But knowing that rejection is not farfetched, I have also applied to Evergreen Valley, and San Jose City. Money will be my biggest problem. But you know what Beat? I am ready for that struggle I would like to inform in detail about my plans, but as always I would like to step forth toward my battlefield, before I begin to toot my horn. But hopefully this world doesn't darken, 'cause light in life is what keeps me.

The Beat Within

Hey what's up! I'm just writing to thank you for sending me an issue, also I got to reading it and was tripping out on all the youngsters going through it in the halls, camp and CYA. I, too, started out on that route as you can see it's gotten me absolutely nowhere.

I guess it all started when I was ten. I was a crazy lil' kid wanted to be known and I started running with the other bad kids and you know what comes with that: fighting, drugs, a lil' robbing and stealing. Eventually I join into a gang with my other friends. We started gang ganging and all that noise.

You know I can't even remember how many times I've been to the halls but once I started going, it changed my thinking even more. I was thinking this ain't nothing I could do this. I started dissing my family. I didn't feel loved or wanted and it hurt so I wanted to hurt them back. I took a couple things from them that I knew would be missing. It was my way of saying eff you guys. I started livin' with my homies and hanging around the streets, just being a straight knucklehead. All during this time, I keep getting busted, having to go to placements or camps. Never once staying, I'd always run into a homie and talk him into splitting with me. So I was always on the run. Just running a muck doing drugs, gang bangings, stealing, all that.

Well, towards the end when I was running some enemies ran into me when I was slippin' and I got blasted on. I got hit and almost died. The bullet went off my chest bone and went right next to my heart. People figured it would slow me down but it just made me angrier. Drugs sure didn't help. I was doing so much meth it would make anybody crazy. Thankfully, I got busted for something else and I found myself going to Y.A. In reception the boards gave me just an 8 months program to do. Well, I ended up trying to be 'that guy' and I spent over 5 years there.

I got caught up for kicking up riots, fighting, drugs, a stabbing and after awhile they thought I was calling shots, so I spent my majority of my time in lock-up. I finally got released after my time maxed out. I went home and my thinking once I got out was just to leave the past behind and just start over in life. It was hard, I had absolutely nothing so I decided to get my hustle on which of course led me to drugs and me doing them. I went right back to the same life. Next thing you know I find myself in prison a couple times. Once again I'm back again over here in "Solano". I've been here a couple years doing my thing rolling with the homies, ready, to put it down whenever. I got caught up in the scene I started a cool hustle. I was on top! But of course it all came falling down.

I ended up in the hole and I'm still in it. It's been like ten and a half months and the hole is nothing nice. Anyways, upon coming here I learned that my wife's health took a turn for the worse. She had two major operations — nothing worked. It hit me hard losing her my world would just crumble. I love her and she's all I have in this world being that my family gave up on me. All the stress just about drove me crazy but I've been sitting here in my cell just thinking about life and the ones I loved and do love. I'm fed up with this life. I want my family back. I want to have a real life so I decided to take action for the first time in my life and change myself for the better, get my life on track like a real man. I owe it to my wife and to my family but most of all to myself.

I'm done with this scene. I dropped out of this gang stuff in here, enrolled myself into some courses, I'm doing the counselor thing. You know just all I can to lead me towards a productive life. Well I guess I'll end for now, just wanted to share a little and let these youngsters know that fast life will lead nowhere, except to an empty cell (if you're lucky) its never too late to get your life on track. This ain't the life. Stay up. Don't let no one get you down. God bless you guys.

ANTHONY MARTINEZ ***In the world today you don't often find people that are courageous enough to give all of themselves as a way to help other people. That what this section is all about. You Beat Without writers are priceless and without you The Beat wouldn't be the great publication it is today. This next writer read an issue we sent to him and couldn't help but be concerned at the young cats we see in our workshops. So like a true tiger, he offered his story and where it led him. For sometimes we don't have to touch the fire, but instead only see someone else touch the fire, to know it's hot. He's touched the fire and right now he's suffering from how much it burned. But while he's healing, he's giving the same lesson he learned to us and that's priceless no matter where he is or what he's done. He's writing from California State Prison — Solano in Vacaville, CA. And we really appreciate every single word.***

We constantly try to remind our workshop participants to be aware of what they write because a lot of times people are reading their writings without them even knowing. Sometimes it can be a problem, but most of the time it's the glue that holds this beautiful thing together. This is the case with this next first time writer that read Beat issue 11.19 and was sad to hear about all the things going on in these young people's lives. Not only was he saddened, but also angry at society and himself for not being good role models to the very same children we're so quick to label as 'bad seeds.' How compassionate is that? You get the sense that though he doesn't have children, he feels responsible for the next generation because of what he's experienced and the knowledge he has to offer. We love welcoming new writers with inspiring ideas, so this is our warm embrace. Keep 'em coming... He's writing from Solano State Prison in Vacaville, CA.

JAMES RICE

Dear All Of You

I wrote to you a couple of a couple of weeks ago after reading an ad in 'Word Out Now'. I received volume 11.19 of the "The Beat Within" after reading this issue, I felt so ashamed at who I am as an adult. Not too long ago we heard the ever powerful words of a president's wife say, "It takes a tribe to raise a child," — tribe, town, city, state, country, world — whatever it takes is not being done.

I'm 47 years old. I started out in "The Hall" as it is now called. Now under three strikes I'm doing 25 to life for cashing a stolen check so I can get more drugs, reading 11.19 I saw me some 30 years ago, and yes I cried for the pain that these proud and tough young men and women are going through. We, as people, are to blame for our youth. We can't in good spirit or good conscience be angry nor can we blame them for their anger or confusion. Is there anyone who truly knows the meaning of life? Or love? Hell, our own government cannot even get along so where did Red and Blue really come from? And if they "our leaders" really cared about our children they would worry less about their raise and help raise this country.

I'm to blame as well even though I have no children, that don't excuse me in the least. When reading how these young men and women feel about their own life, and their tomorrows makes a 47 year old drop tears, then it's beyond being angry at how we have failed these generations of tomorrow's leaders. I think congress and every form of government should be hand fed one page at a time of every issue of "The Beat Within". With the money, resources and time that our leaders give to other countries they can surely stop, look, and listen because when it is all said and done you can believe that God is going to kick some serious ass.

My love and respects to ALL of you at The Beat and I apologize to each and every young man and young woman in our society for me not doing my share. I have given prison my whole adult life and I'm sorry that I was just being too blind to see, may God bless all of you and for what it's worth, thank you!

An after thought! You can be more then what society says what you are, you can be better then the very people who judge you. They just never get caught!

DANIEL CONTRERAS

Writing from the California Training Facility in Soledad, CA, we give you a poet among poets. He's obviously been through the fast life and has changed his ways of thinking. Now a man of the lord, he gives his testimony to us all. We love when someone sounds genuine about their spirituality because all too often we see men cry to God when they're in sticky situations, but then when they are doing well again, they forget to talk to the very God that kept them sane in the first place. We can tell Daniel isn't one of those types of people because the passion he carries illuminates each word as we read every line written. Thank you for your kind words. God bless...

The Invitation

Locked behind bars
I'm seeing stars in the park
Dreaming about my homies in the dark
The way things used to be
The way things should be
Good times, bad times, past times
You know how we used to get down
Banging and slanging
Unto bigger and better thangs
Young entrepreneurs
It was all about a come up
Now were all scattered and shattered
Because the most high
Gots plans for you and I
I ain't talking about resurrecting the hood
But he who has an ear
Let him hear
What the holy spirit says
To the homies at the park
Let me lead you out the dark
Follow me...follow me...follow me
As I follow Christ Jesus
You see?

Where Are You?

I won't, will not
Settle for nothing less but the best,
I seek a Proverbs 31 women
To give my last name too
In this wicked and per verse generation
But all fall short of a God fearing woman
I want a woman of God
Right beside me in this life
True life, Bonnie and Clyde
But riding for Jesus
Beautiful form the inside out
Filled with the holy ghost
Fruit of the spirit in abundance
No lies in between you and I
As we on our knees
Praying for our enemies off-spring and everything in between
I need a woman who respects herself
Who won't even think twice
To give it up to anybody else
Faithful, loyal, compassionate, and true
Baby I'm looking for you
Where you at?
You the one for me "Women of God"
My future wife to be
If you don't know the lord right now
I pray you come to know him
In a mighty way
Because he's the only way
And in his timing,
We'll be together as "one"
Till death do us part.

Predestined

Born in the bay
From (San Jose)the SJ to (Fremont) the F.M.T.
Bounced from here to there
And everywhere
Residing in the eight-oh-five
Trying to survive
Grams took me in when I was 15
Did all she could to raise me
The way she thought she should
Sinful from birth
I was cursed
Every thought, breath and second
Got me closer to death
Destruction was in my eyes, no lie
Grams trying to save me
Telling me I got to change
Tears fall from her eyes
When I replay "its to late for me"
Made my bed in hell
That's where I'll dwell
Till I got caught up in the belly of the whale
All the shame and all the guilt
All the pain and all the games
No where to run no where to hide
Time to face the fears inside
Let the inside out
Accept my destiny
No stopping it, no fighting it.
I might as well rock it
My spot is predestined
To give all the honor and glory
To my father in heaven.

As a young adolescent
Trying to fill my shoes
Now I'm reaching out to you
From behind these bars
Concrete walls
Razor sharp fences and walking grave yards
I'm just another fallen star

Little Homie

You wanted in the dope game
But I wouldn't open the gates
Trying to keep you far away from the streets
But you were persistent
As a young adolescent
Trying to fill my shoes
Now I'm reaching out to you
From behind these bars
Concrete walls
Razor sharp fences and walking grave yards
I'm just another fallen star
But I've seen things, I've never seen before
I've seen the way, the truth and the light
Now I'm on the highway to heaven
Paved by my lord and savior Jesus Christ
Who laid his life down for you, me and everybody
I'm telling my homies, loved ones and enemies
You're on the freeway to hell
But you don't hear me though?
Dedicated to my lil bro Joshua

Greed

From the poetic mind
Of a street hustler
Used to get down and dirty
In the dope game
Weighing thangs out
To half a gram
For twamp
Yeah!
That money use to bring joy
For a little while
But the you wanted more
Now your eyes
See everything as a come up
You only trust a few
Everything as a come up
You only trust a few
Everyone else is out to get
You little do they know
You were just trying to survive
And your eyes got you caught up

Dedicated to everyone out there especially you youngsters on that paper chase trying to come up quick slanging, jacking or whatever you doing. Money ain't everything. What goes up must come down. It's better to do it all legal, get a job and stack your chips little by little. Because with any dishonest gain you bring a curse on yourself and your family, moms, pops, kids, etc. check the good book it'll give you games above all games.

Homies

We used to be to parksters of the same kind
Quick to holler at a female
With the same line
You were just a little shorter
But you still rolled
Now times have changed
Like they always do
We ain't slamming Cadillac doors
Slanging and banging
Hanging with some true ones
Sipping on some brews
Pimping hoes and schooling fools
Now this court system
Tore us apart
Got us twisted
Going down different paths
Knowing one of these days
Our paths will be reunited again
But till then well be together in spirit
Walking by faith
Spiritual roll dogs
For eternity
We don't die
We multiply

DANIEL CONTRERAS (CONT.)

Hello

My mind is surrounded by these walls
I'm waiting till they fall
So I can express my mind
And let them find
The truth for what it is
I didn't kill you son!
I'm sorry! But I didn't
Do the crime
So why am I doing time?

Destiny

Penitentiary dreaming
Before I was an adolescent
Nightmares fulfilled
At the age of seventeen
187 got me tripping
From the hall to the county
28 to life, got me on the TV live
Channel 6 KSBY
Convicted and crucified in the media
Before I ever hit the scene
No hope for the future
Till God reached behind these walls
Opened my eyes
By his mercy and grace
Lifted my face
Set the child inside free
And made known the mystery
Of the kingdom of God to me
Divided 28 by two minus the L,
As I walk thru the furnace of affliction
With my lord
And when all is dark in the valley
Of the shadow of death
I can sing because I got the light
of the world living inside of me
when all is said and done what they
meant for bad God meant for good!

CHARLES SIMMONS

Writing from the San Luis Obispo County Jail in San Luis Obispo, CA, we give you a poem written by a man who wants to teach the younger generation. So often are people employed to teach us that have never been where we've been, so it's nice to hear lessons from a man who's been there and done that. Hopefully, you young folks will learn not to take 'the bait' because we get tired of seeing the same faces come in and out of jail. Let's put the system out of business.

Don't Take The Bait

This is my contribution,
Still institutionalized...
My pursuit of happiness!
Taken time to realize,
The probable causes
That put me away...
Left on probation...
Taken my freedom...
Maxin' out this stay!
Learning from the mistakes,
Still yesterday...
Waiting till tomorrow,
To go on my way...
Makin' necessary changes...
Keeping my game tight,
Straight outrageous!
You could say...
Extend my education...
Make my music forever
And a day!
Straight lacin' the nation,
With that be blazin'
Through the radio waves...
Sendin' my message
Through The Beat,
All you young entrepreneurs
Keep on your feet
You can be anything
You want to be...
But don't take it
From me...
Just set your mind,
Achieve and accelerate...
Can't no one
Take that away...
Stay focused,
Not comatose,
For the best results...
Stay true to
What you do...
Remember don't hate,
The player!
But, the game,
If you wanna play...
And don't take
The bait!
If you wanna stay
Up out the game...

To The Beat Within, sending a positive poem/slight flow to the youngsters out there that need positive influence

BLACKBIRD ***It is such a pleasure to have this next writer out and beaming free with the sun alongside us in our office. Some of us go in and out of jail, finding it difficult to break the cycle of getting released and going back. However, in this cold world all we can ask for is that they learn something along the way. This man always has new lessons to teach us and we love learning from him. He was recently released from San Quentin State Prison and as he was sitting in our office we found this piece. He wrote it there before he was released. The holiday season is nearing and we couldn't have asked for a better gift than the legendary Blackbird 'free' with us. Keep your head up homeboy, you know we're always here for you to lean on.***

Fire And Desire

"Yesterday's score doesn't count for today's game," I remind myself as I wake up to another morning in San Quentin. It's a matter of the utmost importance that I get up and face today and whatever obstacles may come with it and let yesterday stay exactly where it is "yesterday" I feel the fire, prison has it's way of teaching you things by "failure" and a lot of times "failure" is your greatest teacher! Each failure adds to your body of knowledge! When you live in a place where men are executed and housed awaiting to be executed, you could imagine the hostility and fear that surrounds the yards and tiers. The population becomes hostile! But a scared man can't win, so each day becomes another opportunity to learn and grow from each experience! Losers aren't born, they are made somewhere along the way! Not being willing to listen and feeling as though you know too much to learn anything else only leaves you in a position where failures your only option and defeat is your only possibility!

I'm no better than you as a matter of fact I'm probably wearing the same boxers "Scott Peterson" wore last week, but I feel the desire to overcome and move forward and continue to make "internal" development. On a penitentiary yard you learn to deal with hundreds of different personalities and one thing is for sure and two things are for certain, people treat you the way you train them too! If you feel the desire to succeed the average realities of prison life don't feel so overwhelming anymore! Your desire to have a family foundation, a healthy relationship with yourself and our community become your main motivation although you're surrounded by the fire the flames won't burn you, the smoke won't choke you with desire you become "victorious" our former limitations now unlimited the possibilities are endless!

Even as I write this I'm surrounded by hundreds of men screaming flooding the tiers men being victimized and others victimizing "this is San Quentin," but tough times don't last long, tough people do!

SOLO ***Writing from N.A. Chaderjian, one of the hardest Youth Authority institutions to survive through in Stockton, CA, we give you a man that has compassion for the ladies. Yes, you saw it right, it wasn't a typo, we said 'compassion' and not 'passion'. Nowadays it's hard to find a man who has 'compassion' for the ladies because it's all about treating them as items rather than real people. We're glad that he's strong enough to break that barrier and tell it how it should be. He closes with a letter to us asking some really good questions and all we can say is that we used to do workshops at Chad, but because of powers greater than ourselves, all the red tape and the heavy commute we chose to stop. Keep in mind, The Beat Within is not the system, we're guests of the system, and so we have to abide by their rules even if we don't want to. If it was up to us, there'd be a workshop at all three open institutions in Stockton, but it's not totally up to us, so like you we have to bear with it. Unfortunately, we all suffer, but keep the faith, you never know what might happen. Until then keep writing and requesting your Beat!***

To All The Ladies That Have Been Played, I Do This For You.

My name is Anthony Robinson aka Solo. I'm a nineteen-year-old ward at Chaderjian Youth Correctional Facility, serving a three-year term with two more to go. I read The Beat Within whenever I get a hold of it but every volume I read saddens me.

When I read the pieces about how women had been used and abused and left heart-broken and in pain by a man they loved that just played them, I can't help but feel sad and to feel ashamed because I used to do the same thing. I played the game and caused a lot of heartaches. I used to brag about it, I went so far I called myself "Prince Charming." But now that has changed, that's no longer me, I've hung up my jersey and retired from the game, cause I fell in love.

Falling in love changes me completely. I learned how to treat a lady right, how to respect a lady. To this day I'm still learning because like it or not ladies, dealing with you is never easy. For 2 years I had a beautiful relationship with a beautiful woman but sadly that relationship came to an end because of me being locked up. Though we are still very close friends and I still love her as much as I ever did, I am alone.

I am writing this to let all you ladies know that I have been through it — that there is still hope out there. There are still men out there that know what love is and will treat you right. Even the biggest players can change. I write love poems to express the love I have waiting to be given to that special girl, and to give all you ladies hope that you'll find that special love that someone has waiting for you. Good luck, I hope you find it soon.

Beat Within

First of all thank you for The Beat Within volumes and giving incarcerated youth a chance to write about what's on their minds and have it published with feedback. Now there is some things I have to ask about; 1.) Would be too please to publish the pieces I have included and if it's not too hard to send me the volume you put them in if you do publish them. 2.) If you publish my pieces or not I would still like to become a subscriber to The Beat Within. I'll put my name and address at the end of this letter. 3.) Would it be possible to have you guys come do a workshop here at Chaderjian YCF in Stockton?

I really think it would benefit a lot of the wards here and I know we would love to have you. See, a lot of the guys in here don't even know what The Beat Within does. I didn't know about it 'till about a year ago when I found a really old volume half destroyed at the bottom of a locker. I know that if you come here and had a workshop a lot of the wards would start to write some to send to you. And it would help a few to change how they live their lives. Well thank you for your time and I really do hope you guys can find a way to come out here.

Sincerely,

The Power Of A Woman

Her lips gave color to roses so fine,
Her eyes made the stars and taught them to shine.
Her laugh like candy soft and sweet,
Her voice like a song with it's own hypnotic beat.
You sit and watch her as if spellbound,
Never missing a sight, smell, or sound.
You are trapped by her charm and do not see,
That now you are her slave and no longer free.
I can write these words so deep and true,
For I am a slave just like you.
Her beauty is something you can't fight.
And as you lay awake late at night.
You know there is only one thing you or I can do
And that is show her your love will always be true.
Then she can love you without regret
For you are her Romeo and she is your Juliet.

OBA **FRELIMO Throwback from 2000. Here's the intro from issue 4.15...The following two pieces were recently submitted to us by our friend and colleague Oba. Oba just recently transferred from CSP-Sacramento to State Prison Corcoran. Given the unpredictability of his life, he had been out of The Beat loop while working on himself and advocating for better living conditions. The Beat hopes you all feel Oba's words and thoughts this week. As usual they pack a punch. We are certain that Oba will be a little more frequent in the pages of The Beat. He is a valuable friend to us all. Please don't hesitate to drop Oba a line via The Beat. We are sure he'll get back to you with knowledge and understanding.**

Global Peace

It's been about three going on four weeks now that I've been housed in the Corcoran SHU program. When I first reached the compound, I felt good inside I was moving on away from a lot of madness and thoughts ran rampant in my mind of wonder. What would be next? What new challenges would I face? What would be the mental and structural condition of those whom I'd have to walk with behind these walls?

As usual, I kept to myself, observing from afar what was going on. A lot of movement was going on, until finally I was placed in a section with a few more inmates. They were of different races, however that wasn't my main concern. I was closely evaluating myself and how I felt and was reacting to my present living condition. Deep inside, I wanted to reach out and let the inmates around me know I was a cool individual, yet knowing the many mind games and manipulations, I remained lid. A head nod was given to those I had watched walking in the section on escorts. Yet that was it. I still felt out of place not being able to express myself fully.

Racism has plagued us badly. At times, I catch myself from harvesting racist thoughts when I see symbols or other's actions that have been labeled racist. However, I'm not being perfect and at times, I may get pulled into such thinking and it makes me study harder and hope for the stereotypes to be overcome. I've grown to understand that just because I've overcome certain hurdles within myself in dealing with living, that doesn't mean the problems don't exist outside of my being. They do, and my job is not done until we all can fix the problems together. This is my take on it.

I sat inside my assigned cell and fell out in tears watching the news and the war going on in Kosovo. Sitting inside the cell watching the families run for their lives really made me think about my current confinement in prisons. I've never experienced having to run and dodge tanks and aircraft dropping bombs. I'm sure the majority of us who live and have grown up in the United States and haven't been in any kind of Military, haven't experienced such either.

The thought crossed my mind, "What can I do to help? What can we, the civilians do to help in such a crisis?". The news had been broadcasted that peace in the civil war going on in Kosovo will not come any time soon. I don't know how others may feel or think about their situation, yet I'm viewing it as something we all share deep, heartfelt feelings about and want to see ended. So how will it end? How can we prevent it from happening here in our country, in a way that can be used in other countries?

Here are a few solutions that came to mind from within my spirit. I must let all of the readers know that all of my scripts come from my heart and spirit that I was blessed by The Most High to receive.

#1. All forms of toy guns and cartoons with wars and fighting should be banned.
Reason: Because as the youth grow, they are constantly preparing themselves to battle something, when in fact fighting should be the last thing on children's minds. "Protection" instead should be the main factor for our children and us, not weapons for protection. Look at what condition many of us are in and the loved ones we've lost due to arms. Martial Arts is a good form of protection if needed.

#2. Conflict Management Centers. We should build Conflict Management Centers in every sector of our communities. That way, when people are in conflicts and have problems that need mending, they can go to these centers and work them out with psychologists, sages, counselors, etc. As well, as in some schools within San Francisco, such as Everett Middle School, who have conflict management classes, all businesses and school institutions should have the same if they don't already.

#3. Crisis Centers. We should build Crisis Centers and shelters within our communities.
Reason: The government has built and supplied money for many centers and shelters that we have. However, the majority of them are full or don't have proper supplies to take care of all the homeless we have here now. Also, in case something takes place that shouldn't have such as a fire or a flood in our homes, we'd have a place already secured.

When I say "we", I'm speaking in terms of "us" in our individual lives. We can donate monthly towards building these centers ourselves without the government's help. I know many have bills to pay and other obligations, yet any donation counts, if nothing more than an idea. My terminology and view of donate isn't money and only money. I look at people's views, ideas, input, actions, dedication and loyalty as donations. Because it's not money alone that builds and manages institutions, it's people. "Us", Man and Woman Power, the youth, etc.

Honestly, I see our world becoming a better place and love, peace and respect taking control of everything. I believe and many whom I know believe

Wisdom

Wisdom is formed from human's right actions, thoughts and beliefs in a higher power that gives us direction and guidance in our lives. We also obtain wisdom from observance of other's actions around us in our environment. However, in our daily lives, changes are rapid and what we grasp in our realities in which we nurture, what we learn must be something that will remain solid throughout the epoches of time.

Hours, minutes, seconds, days, weeks, months and years pass and many around us don't see the changes in our world. Those of us who do not recognize the changes adapt to them much quicker than those who seek the way back and follow the flow of fads. Also, there are many who lurk in the shadows to exploit the talents of others for self benefit and not for the totality of our whole communities. Those of us who've been in the street life and walked down the roads of inequality know how unwise decisions and actions in one's life could become a downfall or possibly a come-up.

I believe it's not what you may know that makes you wise, but as well your character in how you present yourself around those you work with, peers and society period. If you're dressed clean in a suit, white silk shirt, nice leather shoes, etc. Your appearance will most likely be accepted not only in a business arena, but as well in the ghettos and low standard but highly publicized lounges. As opposed to being dressed tacky and showing the aura of a thug. Not that there's a problem with the latter, however you must be wise enough to know when to do what. What's the limit or level of being wise?

BAGPIES' ***Throwbacks from 1999. Here's one from our third year. The 3.XX issue (not sure of the exact issue) ...Bagpipes was once a major contributor in our workshops from the max unit in Santa Clara County Juvenile Hall. The following pieces were his latest contributions from the CYA (California Youth Authority), Preston in Ione, Ca***

Lucky

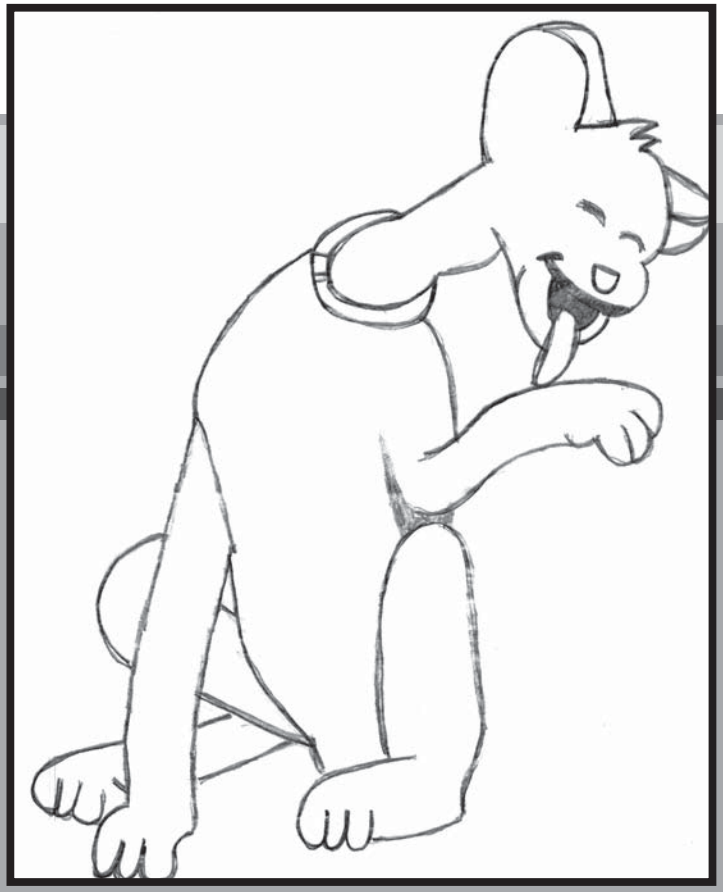
Imagine this. Imagine you can be you without the mask. Without the fear. Without the lies. Imagine the joy of reading your favorite book, listening to your favorite song, smelling the warm summer breeze. Imagine that you are free. Now, open your eyes and look at your bleak concrete walls, your county or state issue clothes, your scratchy blanket and stinky mattress. Sucks, doesn't it?

What if I told you that you're lucky? What if I told you that hundreds of people would rather be in your place, serving a couple months or a couple years? You'd think I'm crazy, right? Ok, so maybe I am, but still, you are lucky.

You're lucky because you're not dead. Your lucky because people in prisons in other countries consider sandwiches a luxury item and wool blankets a gift from God. You're lucky because the power to change is within you. Don't roll your eyes at that. You are the highest authority over you. Only you are responsible for picking up that 40, that swisher, that pipe. You are responsible for stealing that car, that jewelry. You are responsible for shooting the gun, for pulling the knife. If you feel you weren't in control, it's because you gave up control.

I'm not trying to give y'all a guilt trip or anything. I'm trying to help you see. Seeing is the first step to changing. Seeing that you are the root of your problems helps you gain the strength to change. The bullshh programs they give you in CYA, Juvy, County, wherever don't do anything for you. They don't change you, you change you.

So what's it going to be, a life of imagining or a life of doing?



Look At You Now

You thought you were cool, but you were just a fool
Puffin on that blunt real phat, funk that
You wastin your life drinkin Bud Light, it ain't right
You have to fight against the games people play,
You got to say no, it's not my way, living from day to day
Ain't no way to get paid, while you're gettin' laid
I'll be in school. While you're playin' pool
I'll be gettin' a degree and then you'll see me in a drop top
Benz with all my friends, rolling in cash in a flash
and I'll pass your ass on the streets, sayin'
you thought you were cool but you're just a fool,
and just look at you now. Pow!

Puffin on that blunt real phat, funk that
You wastin your life drinkin Bud Light, it ain't right

So what's it going to be, a life of imagining or a life of doing?

Awaken -- A Poet's View of the Buddha-Dharma

In a slipstream sideways, deep in hearts longing
No blame, no confusion, no desire in flowers.
Forget yourself, you exist as a whole,
In constant flux, an angel's whisper in a vacant dream.
Fluid thoughts flow like clouds over a mountain,
Ever rolling, polishing, shaped
No release from the ache in your heart until
You see the truth of reality.
Sand dollars on the shore, thousands upon millions
Bleaching in the glorious sun
So we are drying in conceptual ignorance
Millions of people trying too hard, stress
Fractures dream of peace, diamond shards
Painful bliss, horrid ecstasy
Control imprisons your beautiful soul, crying
To be free to shine in the breeze.
Force is vulgar, belief a sin, faith is
just a temporary dream. Awaken, Awaken and be free.

Spiritual War

Right now as I write this piece there is a somewhat of a spiritual war going on inside of me. The battle ground is in my head, the prize is my soul. As some of y'all know I come from a very religious and God fearing family.

My mom is a devoted Christian women, and pops just recently became a preacher at the church they attend. Some of the homeboys in my old units (in juvenile Hall) used to say pops looked like a pimp when he came to visit me on Sundays, wearing a suit with some alligator shoes and a brim hat with the feather on the side.

Anyways, when I was coming up moms and pops used to always talk to me about God and try to teach me their religion, but I couldn't get down with the things they were saying. I couldn't believe something I couldn't see and hadn't done a thing for me.

You see my childhood was rough, before moms and pops got into religion, pops was on drugs and wasn't there most of my young life, When he was around he was beating on moms, my brother, or me.

My neighborhood wasn't no better, run by a gang and filled with drugs, plus before I reached 16 years old I had loss three close homeboys to gang violence. So I didn't believe in the things they were telling me, everything they said went in one ear and out the other. Or so I thought.

(This is where the spiritual war comes in.) I guess it's true that when people get locked down God starts talking to them, because for the past couple of months it seems like God has been trying to speak to me. It's just like on television where God's sitting on one shoulder and the Devil on the other, and both of them are speaking to you. All the things moms used to tell me I still remember and I can hear her voice. But then the Devil starts talking to me and I forget everything she said and I end up going back to my old ways. It's like a game of tug-a-war, but it's annoying as hell! Honestly, I don't know who is winning the war, only time will tell the victor.

To all that know me in Juvenile, keep your heads up and stay strong. Don't trip off what the man can do or say to you. Stand on your own two feet and be your own man. To Baby A who's one of my closest folks in the Hall, like I said, we at the crossroads of our lives, which way you gonna go? The game is deceiving, don't let it deceive you! I send you all much love and respect!

my whole life I've had people trying to force their way of thinking upon me and live their lives through me.

BRANDON AKA LAYZIE

Throwback from 2000.

This one comes from issue 5.48...We want to welcome back our old friend Brandon to the pages of The Beat. It wasn't too long ago Brandon was a strong participant in our weekly workshops in Santa Clara County Juvenile. Now given the seriousness of Brandon's case, and his charges, he writes us from the adult jail pending the outcome of his case. Whatever the case may be, we want Brandon to know we at The Beat are willing to take the ride with him as much as he allows us into his world. Brandon has definitely shown his ability and strength to teach from his pain. The following commentaries you are about to read, Brandon tackles himself, and who he really is. We send our love and respect, as we look forward to hearing more from Brandon in the coming year, 2001.

Looking In My Eyes

Lately, I find myself staring at my reflection in the mirrior for hours on end. Staring into the eyes they say of a murderer, hardcore gang member, and menace to society. I try to fight those thoughts out of my head, searching for the person I know I truly am, but I have a slight problem, I don't know who I entirely am.

For years I've lived in what some have called a fantasy world. Throughout my whole life I've had people trying to force their way of thinking upon me and live their lives through me.

I also have a problem with always trying to please those around me and often forgetting about myself. I've realized I've allowed and done this to myself in order to hide from or block out parts of my life that I don't care to think about. Or is it that I'm not man enough to face? So at some point in my life I believe I lost my self identity and conformed into what others wanted me to be in order to please them, therefore forgettin' myself.

So, for the first time, I find myself getting lost in my eyes, looking for Brandon. It's true I can see the eyes of a person who has gang affiliations and who has caused a little trouble here and there. There's no point denying those facts. But what can I see that they can't see or don't want to see, are the eyes of a lost and confused young man.

I can see the eyes of a young man whose heart is filled with love but was never taught how to truly express that feeling. I can see the eyes of a quiet young man who hides in a shell so to speak, who keeps things inside for fear of getting hurt and letting others get too close.

I see years of built up anger and depression in these eyes. I see so much bottled up emotion in these eyes, it seems like it may all burst out. But through these eyes I can also see a young man who doesn't know how or doesn't want to let those emotions out. I see the eyes of a young man who is wise past his years. I see the eyes of a young man who is at the crossroads of his life, who knows which way he should go, but is scared to let go. Not for fear of what man will do or say but because it's a place were for years he felt comfortable and was all he knew for so long.

I don't see the eyes of a murderer or menace to society! Someone, please tell me where they see those eyes, because if I had those eyes I would have no soul. If they look in my eyes they may or may not be able to see what I see. But if they were even to just take a glimpse into my eyes I guarantee them they'll see the eyes of a young man who has a soul.

To whomever takes the time to read this, this is me! I hope you can feel it. Layzie sends much love and respect!

I don't see the eyes of a murderer or menace to society! Someone, please tell me where they see those eyes, because if I had those eyes I would have no soul. If they look in my eyes they may or may not be able to see what I see. But if they were even to just take a glimpse into my eyes I guarantee them they'll see the eyes of a young man who has a soul.

check out the rest of Brandon AKA Layzie's throw back piece on page 59